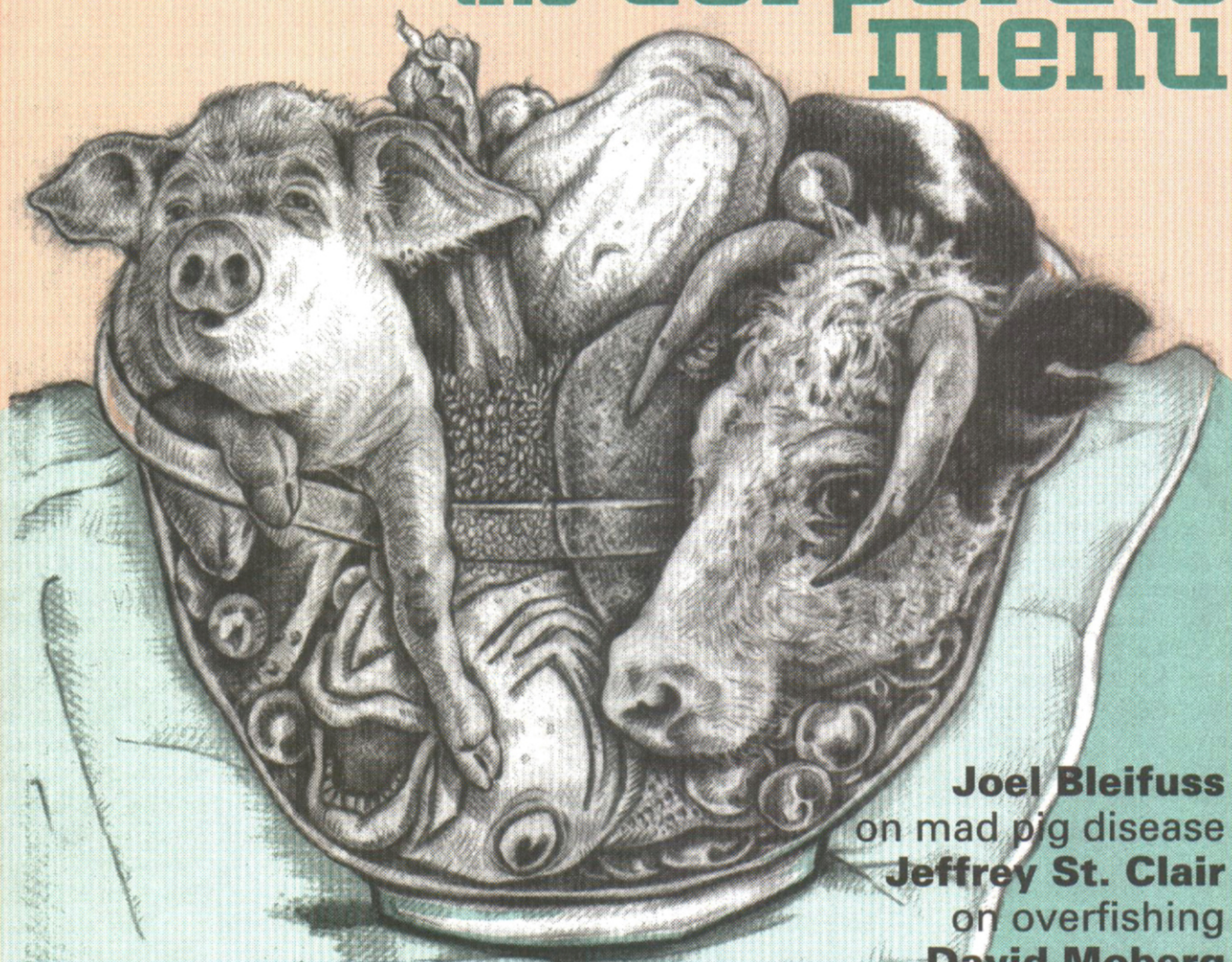


SPECIAL FOOD ISSUE

May 26-June 8, 1997

IN THESE TIMES

What's on the corporate menu



Joel Bleifuss

on mad pig disease

Jeffrey St. Clair

on overfishing

David Moberg

on strawberry pickers' misery

Jennifer Ferrara

on the end of the family dairy farm

Salim Muwakkil

on USDA bias against black farmers

\$2.50/CANADA \$3.00



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EDITORIAL

THE COLD WAR LEGACY IN ZAIRE

In May, 1960, in the newly independent Belgian Congo—now known as Zaire—Patrice Lumumba and his party won a plurality in elections for the nation's new parliament. Lumumba was not only a charismatic leader but also a leftist. When Katanga province seceded with Belgium's backing, Lumumba naturally turned to the Soviet Union, the enemy of his country's former colonial masters, for assistance. It was a fatal error, one that provided President Dwight Eisenhower with an excuse to move against him. A month later, carrying out Eisenhower's instructions, the CIA successfully pulled off a coup. Four months after he was elected, Lumumba found himself out of office.

But he was still alive—and still a national hero, now threatening to form a new government. How to prevent this? For the CIA, the answer was simple: Kill him. The agency made elaborate plans to do so, but Katanga leader Moïse Tshombe conveniently solved the problem for them. His troops captured Lumumba and beat him to death.

Enter Joseph Mobutu, now known as Mobutu Sese Seko. The CIA recruited him to help displace and then replace Lumumba. His was a one-man regime from the beginning because the United States and the former European colonial powers did not trust the people of Zaire to elect a leader who would let the West control their country's resources. At a time when national liberation movements were sweeping the Third World, true democracy would likely have resulted in socialists of one kind or another taking control in many places. That would have been bad for business.

The Cold War presented a rationale for preventing such an outcome. Thus, in the '60s and '70s, dictatorships became the norm in areas controlled by the West. Such states were considered more manageable, and the cost of protecting corporate interests was relatively low—for all except the people living in those countries. The U.S. gov-

ernment could downplay the brutality visited on the natives or, if publicized, explain it away as necessary to prevent the greater evil of Soviet footholds in the contested areas of a bipolar world.

On the other side of the great Cold War divide, dictatorships were also the rule. The Communists believed in a one-party state. In their areas of control or influence, they sometimes allowed other token parties to exist, notably in Europe, where multi-party systems had been well-established before World War II. But in the Third World, where few of the newly emerging countries had experience with parliamentary democracy, and where political parties were weak and the authoritarian traditions of colonialism strong, one-man rule backed by military force was a natural outcome of Soviet policy.

These policies on both sides took an enormous toll both in human suffering and in the disruption—and corruption—of the process of independence and development. In Zaire and the new states surrounding it, this was especially true. While Mobutu and the Western corporations he

served made billions, his country sank deeper and deeper into misery. And beyond Zaire's borders, at the CIA's urging, Mobutu helped prevent other peoples from going freely about the business of nation-building.

In Angola, for example, which became independent after the leaders of Portugal's 1974 socialist revolution decided to abandon their African colony, Mobutu helped the United States prevent the left-wing MPLA from consolidating its new government. Acting as a conduit for the CIA, Mobutu supplied arms both to his brother-in-law Holden Roberto, who

led a group called the FNLA, and to strongman Jonas Savimbi's UNITA. The FNLA didn't last long, but Savimbi, who got aid from China and South Africa as well as the United States, managed to keep that nation in turmoil—and in poverty—up to the present. Only with Mobutu's imminent demise has Angola been able to form a coalition government.

Now, after the fall of the leader that the CIA created and kept in power with massive amounts of military aid, just about everyone in the media acknowledges that Mobutu was our man. But instead of pointing out the United States' central role in Zaire's stunted development, the media have bombarded us with putdowns, usually in the form of laments, of the failure of the country to modernize peacefully.

The Cold War is over. But as the firestorms in Zaire and Angola make clear, the Third World is still bearing the bitter fruits of neo-colonial intervention. ◀

*Development has
been thwarted by
U.S. intervention
in the internal
affairs of
emerging African
nations.*

IN THESE TIMES
 "...with liberty and justice for all"

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InTHESETIMES

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L E T T E R S

Deep irony

After reading Daniel Lazare's review of Joseph J. Ellis' and Conor Cruise O'Brien's recent books about Thomas Jefferson (April 14), I thought readers of *In These Times* might want to know that in fact there have been *three* recent books about Thomas Jefferson's character and what he means to Americans. My own *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* was a dual main selection of the History Book Club along with Ellis' *American Sphinx*, and has been the subject of numerous reviews around the country. I am neither an "Irish conservative" nor what one could call a traditional "American historian." I am a law professor, and I'm also an African-American female—the kind of person who doesn't usually get to pontificate on such weighty matters as the discontents of Jeffersonianism, which is what makes the reception

I'm getting in the mainstream press so pleasantly surprising.

There is deep irony here. In the "mainstream" media, my book is most often treated in joint reviews with the O'Brien and Ellis books. But Lazare chose the well-worn path of showcasing the work of yet two more white male authors seeking to define Jefferson for everyone—what we've had for the past 150 years and what has been a problem all along. That is why I found it strange to see Lazare blast American historians for their refusal "to admit the possibility" of "radically revising our political culture," as if O'Brien and Ellis represented the only current choices for a view of Jefferson. That is not the case. We'll not have a radical revision of our political culture until Americans of all colors and persuasions can be heard on the subject of the founders of America.

Annette Gordon-Reed
New York

School-to-work

Chris Seymour's "Reich's sorry reign" (March 31) was insightful, but inaccurate in one important detail. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act was not "designed to place students in apprenticeships that lead to jobs with a future." This statement describes only the draft act.

School-to-work is not conventional vocational education. Rather, it is designed to bring purpose to all students' learning. The objective is to develop the sense that whatever skills are needed to pursue a chosen future, students have the capacity, knowledge and confidence to pursue their vision as it unfolds. The knowledge, attitudes and skills learned within one career perspective or another are equally complex, rigorous and preparatory for whatever future education, lifelong learning and careers each student ultimately pursues.

Peter F. Seidman
Berkeley, Calif.

Think, then speak

As a Midwesterner and religious believer, I find offensive Jane Slaughter's article on *Susie Bright's Sexual State of the Union* (April 28). While Slaughter may consider herself a "victim of Midwesternization," many of us are proud of our regional heritage, do not feel we are "vic-

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



times" of it and do not appreciate her smart-aleck put-down. For 15 years of my working life, I lived in the Bay area. Except for the climate, I did not find it in any way superior to the Midwest. I was happy to return to my roots here to retire.

Bright's belittling derogatory remarks about Christians hardly indicate that she "takes on religion," as Slaughter claims. Rather, Bright's ignorance of these believers and beliefs is appallingly evident. She equates everyone in the "traditional Christian group" with the Christian right, and appears to be totally unaware of the many liberals in all Christian denominations.

Both Slaughter and her friend would do well to read authorities on the subject instead of being misinformed by "online discussions." It might lead both of them to do some serious thinking before commenting flippantly on a subject they know little about. Bright should stick to sex, if that's her thing. Religion can be left to the "true believers."

Articles like this prompt me to search for a periodical of the left that supports my political and economic views without gratuitously insulting my heritage and my religious faith. I will keep this in mind when it's time to renew my subscription to *ITT*.

Blanche Jantzen
Bartelso, Ill.

Double bind

Talk about making bad career choices! This week a friend of mine sent me two articles from *In These Times* (April 14): one on how driving a taxi is the most hazardous job in America; the other reviewing a book on the plight of Ph.D.s whose title speaks for itself: *Will Teach for Food*.

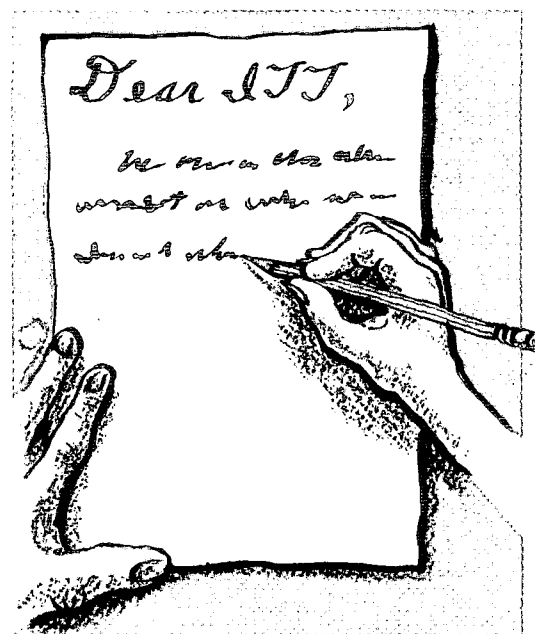
I finished my doctoral dissertation in history last December and started driving a cab part-time in February. In fact, my diploma arrived in the mail on the same day I got my cabby license.

I took the driving job because after seven years in grad school, I had no prospects for a full-time academic job and faced a mountain of student loans and credit-card debt (which I'd run up to pay the \$900-a-semester fees the university charged me to sit at home and write my dissertation).

The two articles made me wonder how I could make such foolhardy choices. But as I consider picking a new career, I'm not overwhelmed with ideas for appealing jobs with great employment prospects. If you can find work that is not dull, socially destructive or soul-destroying, you generally have to get in line. Hoards of fellow sufferers have endured nearly a decade of graduate school to qualify for nonexistent teaching positions because those jobs seemed superior to staring at a computer screen, guarding the growing prison population, selling credit cards over the phone or waiting tables.

Driving a taxi—in spite of the sagging car seats and often sub-minimum wages—is far less alienating than most jobs a person can get without skills or training. As much as they complain about company policies, lack of health insurance and low wages, few of my fellow cabbies complain about the work. I start every shift feeling that I'm embarking on a new adventure—in part because of the danger, but really more because each passenger will have a different story to tell. And unlike waiters or salespeople, cabbies have the time and space to converse with their customers about something other than business. For someone who's spent the past four years hunched over a dissertation, the human connection is like a drug.

Bill Jordon
Dover, N.H.



Millionaire doctors

Your editorial (April 28) talked about millionaire doctors in Tucson joining unions to defend themselves. I make no case one way or the other on the unionizing idea for doctors at the Thomas-Davis Medical Centers here, but I doubt you know whether or not they are millionaires. In fact, I doubt that any of them are, which is one of the reasons they have resorted to the tactics they have.

Next, in the same editorial, you assert that the Soviet Union was an alternative to corporate power. That claim was naive at best and a horrible misstatement at worst. The Soviets never offered an alternative, given their well-known lack of human rights, law or attention to workers' rights, beyond the propaganda of their tyrannical leadership.

Joseph J. Honick
Tucson, Ariz.

Editor's note: As we stated in the April 28 editorial, the doctors in Tucson sold their shares in their HMO to a corporation for \$3.2 million each, thus making themselves millionaires. The Soviet system was that country's alternative to capitalist development, i.e., corporate power. That's simply a statement of fact, not a value judgment.

InSHORT



Ralph Reed's hour of need

Will Ralph Reed go down in history as the mastermind of a series of federal crimes designed to advance the fortunes of Republican politicians and crony consultants? While ongoing federal investigations and lawsuits signal this possibility, you would never know it from the press coverage Reed received when he stepped down recently as executive director of the Christian Coalition. There is much more, and much less, to the story than meets the eye.

Reports of Reed's departure have been greatly exaggerated. He is actually being kicked upstairs to the Christian Coalition's small and powerful board of directors, where he joins founder and president Pat Robertson and Robertson's son Gordon, among others. Reed will not vacate his post

until September and will help select his successor.

Reed's move comes at a time when the organization needs a manager more than a wunderkind. Already an old hand at a young age when Robertson hired him in 1989, Reed quickly led the Christian Coalition to the cutting edge of political innovation and right-wing militancy. Over the last few years, however, Reed has established the coalition as an inside-the-Beltway lobby for Republican legislation, modeled, he says, on the National Education Association and the Chamber of Commerce. Even though its membership has been in decline and probably totals no more than 500,000—considerably less than the 1.9 million Reed claims—the coalition can continue Reed's formula of voter mobilization, voter-guide distribution and lobbying without the media-created personality cult of Reed himself to keep it going.

Meanwhile, other groups are vying for the coalition's mantle as articulator of the far-right agenda: The Promise Keepers men's movement is cresting as a cultural force; Christian theocrats D. James Kennedy and James Dobson—who are further to the right than Reed and Robertson—are emerging as significant political players; and the militant U.S. Taxpayers Party is siphoning off some of the coalition's base in the GOP.

A more compelling reason for Reed's resignation—completely missed by the mainstream media—

may be his impending legal problems. Reed is now a central figure in a tangle of federal investigations and private lawsuits alleging financial chicanery during his tenure as executive director. Legal expenses are likely to eat up a hefty chunk of the big money he'll earn as a political consultant. In typical Beltway fashion, Reed will use his new business venture, Century Strategies, to raise Republican cash in his hour of need. If it worked for former Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell, it certainly ought to work for Reed.

The extraordinary docket of cases involving Reed includes a Federal Election Commission (FEC) suit alleging that Reed's organization engaged in partisan electoral activities—including rigging "independent" voter guides and phone-

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banking—on behalf of, and possibly in collaboration with, Republican politicians, including George Bush, Jesse Helms, Oliver North and Newt Gingrich. The FEC charges that the money spent to help the Republicans amounted to millions of dollars worth of illegal corporate contributions. Pre-trial motions are currently before a U.S. District Court, and a trial date has not yet been set. The coalition faces a similar private lawsuit filed by Democrats in New York state.

The IRS has for several years been investigating the Christian Coalition's provisional 501(c)(4) nonprofit tax status. So far, the agency has neither granted nor taken it away, but, depending on the investigation's findings, the coalition may be forced to reorganize as a political action committee (PAC) and disclose its donors. While many nonprofit groups are politically active, partisan electoral activities must be financed through PACs, which are subject to federal reporting requirements and spending limits.

Perhaps Reed's most serious legal problem involves charges of good, old-fashioned white-collar crime. The U.S. Attorney's office in Norfolk, Va., is investigating alleged contract irregularities and excessive billing by the consulting firm of Hart/Conover, which provided printing, mailing and fundraising services to the Christian Coalition for several years.

Judy Liebert, the longtime chief financial officer of the Christian Coalition, alerted Reed last year to possible improprieties on the part of Hart/Conover, including evidence of over-billing amounting to nearly \$1 million. According to Liebert's attorney, Moody Stallings, she "was told to leave it alone," and "cut out of the loop." Unable to get a satisfactory response, and unwilling to be left holding the bag, Liebert took her concerns, along with documentation, to the U.S. Attorney in Norfolk. While federal prosecutors and the U.S. Postal Service launched parallel investigations, Liebert was barred from the coalition's office in Chesapeake, Va., and ultimately fired. Hart/Conover partner Ben Hart, a close friend and golfing buddy of Reed, is best-known as a founder of the right-wing *Dartmouth Review*. Naturally, questions have been raised about what Reed knew, and when he knew it.

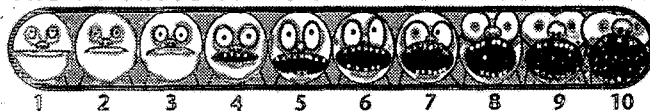
However, Stallings says, unless the Christian Coalition makes a complaint about the alleged bilking—which isn't likely—or the Postal Service finds evidence of mail fraud, the authorities aren't likely to press charges. Meanwhile, the Christian Coalition has reportedly suspended doing business with the firm pending the outcome of the investigations.

Whether criminal charges against Reed will arise from any of these investigations is a matter of speculation. However, it does seem likely that at some point, Reed will be deposed and compelled to testify under oath in court. Whatever the future holds for Reed and the vulnerable organization he still leads, the announcement of his resignation should be noted as one of the most clever national solicitations for business of any political consultant in recent political history.

—Frederick Clarkson

APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

Gummi logic 7.2

Cigarettes addictive? Why, they're no more addictive than gelled candy treats! According to a sworn deposition by Philip Morris President James Morgan, obtained by CBS News, cigarettes are a lot like Gummi Bears. "I love Gummi Bears," he explained, "and I want Gummi Bears, and I like Gummi Bears, and I eat Gummi Bears, and I don't like it when I don't eat my Gummi Bears, but I'm certainly not addicted to them."

Yemen syndrome 6.3

Looking to be kidnapped? Try Yemen, where (The Associated Press reports) "kidnapping tourists, diplomats and oil workers has become a national pastime." Over the past four years, nearly 100 foreigners have been captured and held hostage by local tribesmen upset over the poor treatment they've gotten from the government. Surprisingly, many of the former captives seem none the worse for wear. "After initial fear and bewilderment, foreigners

often emerge in high spirits, sometimes with gifts of curved daggers or Arab robes from their gracious captors," the AP notes. "I always tell my friends if you're going to be kidnapped, Yemen is the place to be kidnapped," comments American diplomat Haynes Mahoney, who was held for six days in 1993.



The train kept a-rollin' 8.3

After a woman was hit and killed by a commuter train on the tracks at a railway station in Essex, England, railway officials ordered a succession of trains to continue rolling over the body rather than wait a few hours until the corpse could be removed, London's *Daily Telegraph* recently reported. Signal assistant Peter Meekings told investigators that he covered the body up, but since he wasn't allowed to move it, he simply ordered trains to continue on with the body still lying between the rails. "Trains were allowed to continue to run, but at 5 m.p.h.," he recalled. "Later, I increased that to 10 m.p.h. because the body was not touched by the trains. We are allowed to run trains as long as drivers are informed that a body is on the line." A railway spokesman explained that "full account was taken at the time of the sensitivity of the situation."

AS PART OF A LAWSUIT SETTLEMENT, THE CIGARETTE MANUFACTURER **LIGGETT** ADMITTED THAT IT TARGETED THE MARKETING OF ITS ADDICTIVE, CANCER-CAUSING PRODUCTS TO CHILDREN.

OTHER CONSUMER COMPANIES, SEEING LIGGETT'S SALES INCREASE, AND MINDFUL OF THE AXIOM "NO PUBLICITY IS BAD PUBLICITY", ALSO DECIDED TO COME CLEAN WITH WHAT EVERYONE ALREADY KNOWS...

ALERT THE MEDIA! IT'S...

CORPORATE CONFESSIONS

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Bridge to nowhere

A budget is like an X-ray: It reveals the innards of the political system. We now have a budget deal between President Bill Clinton and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, and it's not a pretty sight. Radical surgery is recommended.

To begin on a positive note, what would we like to find? Consider the Head Start program, which provides comprehensive early childhood development services to children in poor families to equip them to enter public school on a comparable footing with their classmates. Of the nation's 2 million three- and four-year olds who qualify for this program, about 800,000 are currently served. Even though both parties praise the program, the president's modest goal is to expand its clientele to 1 million over the next five years. If the program is worthwhile, why not make it available to all eligible children, instead of restricting it to the winners of a de facto lottery?

A second example: Civilian public investment (in infrastructure, research and development, education and training, and the like) fares even worse. In 1997, outlays in these areas are projected at \$136 billion, or 1.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In George Bush's administration, the level was as high as 1.9 percent of GDP, and during the Reagan administration, up to 2.5 percent. We would need an extra \$60 billion next year to compare to efforts during the reign of the Great Sonambulator.

Public investment has been shown to increase the growth of labor productivity. Such growth is a precondition, though not a guarantee, of growth in wages, family incomes and tax revenue. The benefits of such spending provide common political ground for the poor and the rest of the working class.

By way of justifying budget austerity, we are told the cupboard is bare and the public won't stand for higher taxes. But we don't need to raise taxes to begin getting things done if we reject the goals of balancing the budget, reducing taxes, financing a bloated military establishment and kowtowing to the Federal Reserve Bank. None of these objectives are worth what they would cost the country. Let's consider them one at a time.

Judging from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) data, a balanced budget only makes sense when compared to the consequences of utter fiscal recklessness. The ideal choice, however, is neither the abstinence of zero deficits nor the promiscuity of unrestrained borrowing, but the safe sex of a balanced "program budget," where total expenditures net of interest payments approximate total revenues.

Over the next ten years, deficits will be lower than what a balanced program budget would require. These near-term deficits are so low, in fact, that the CBO finds virtually no difference in economic outcomes between balancing the budget in five years and running the budget on automatic

Irony's wilderness

JOHN GANNON, THE CIA'S DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR Intelligence, recently gave a speech at Georgetown University in which he stressed the need for open communication between the agency and Congress. The Associated Press reports that in the address, Gannon recalled a congressional briefing during which a CIA official exhibited a chart detailing international covert operations. One indignant lawmaker demanded to know why the CIA was conducting so many "parliamentary operations" around the world. The agency official calmly explained that these were "paramilitary operations." The congressman calmed down. "The more of those the better," he said. "Just stay away from parliaments."

—Joel Bleifuss

pilot. In other words, if current laws on taxes and entitlements remain unchanged, and if all other spending remains constant in inflation-adjusted terms, the GDP dividend by 2007 under a balanced budget is less than 0.5 percent.

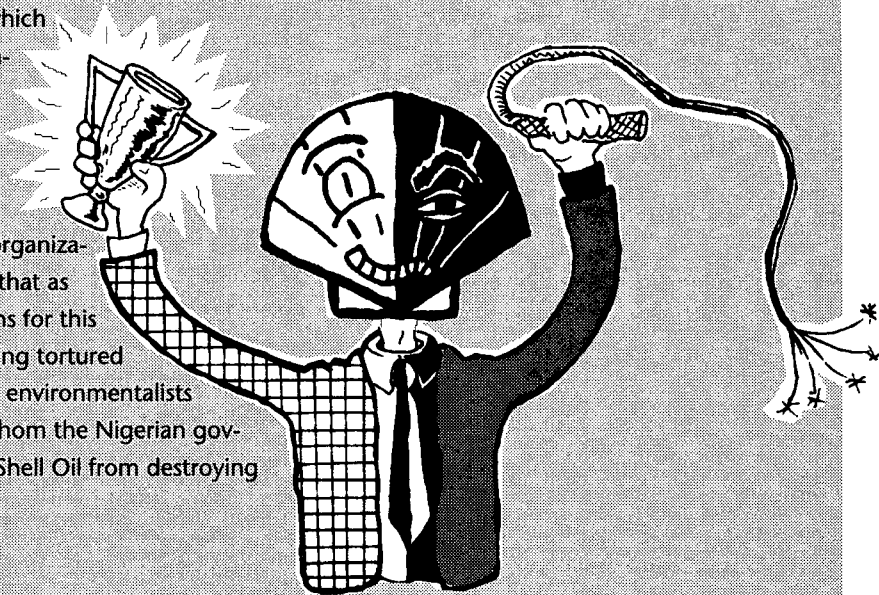
Under a balanced program budget, federal debt would be allowed to grow at the same rate as GDP. By the year 2050, the CBO estimates, real GDP per capita will double whether or not the budget is balanced, as long as public debt is not allowed to grow faster than GDP. Fifty-five years hence, balancing the budget only gets us an extra 2.5 percent of real GDP per capita. Moreover, the slim-to-none benefits of balancing the budget found by the CBO do not factor in the social costs of decimating federal spending, nor the harm to economic growth from reduced public investment. In other words, the CBO figures are biased in favor of budget-balancing. Maintaining safe deficits would provide more than \$500 billion in spending capacity over the next decade relative to the "automatic pilot" scenario, and much more compared to balancing the budget.

On top of deficit-cutting rigors, the current budget deal provides for a tax cut of \$250 billion over 10 years. This plan is bad for a number of reasons: First, the tax relief goes overwhelmingly to the very rich. According to the Citizens for Tax Justice, most families who get tax relief will be looking at about \$500, whereas high-income families will enjoy \$20,000 a year. Moreover, the provisions pertaining to capital gains and individual retirement accounts "backload" costs, which means they reduce deficits in the short run but increase them after the magic year of budget balance, 2002. Finally, none of the tax cuts will do anything to augment capital formation and economic growth. Under present tax law, federal tax revenues are projected to grow more slowly than GDP. Just by preventing this erosion, we could recoup \$350 billion by 2007.

Under the budget deal, military spending will be reduced by about \$75 billion cumulatively over five years. According

Out damn spot!

SHELL OIL AND THREE OTHER PETROCHEMICAL COMPANIES HAVE DONE SOMETHING GOOD: THEY HAVE AGREED TO give up their right to test for oil near the Queen Charlotte Islands off the coast of British Columbia. For that noble deed, the World Wildlife Fund nominated the companies for the British Columbia Minister's Environmental Award for 1997. But the Ogoni solidarity network of Vancouver, which holds weekly demonstrations at local Shell stations to protest the company's dealings with the repressive Nigerian regime of Sani Abacha, has raised some basic questions about the award. In a very polite open letter, the solidarity group took the environmental organization to task. "We should think about the fact that as the World Wildlife Fund was filling in the forms for this nomination, 19 Ogoni activists were likely being tortured in a Nigerian jail," the letter stated. The jailed environmentalists are comrades of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the writer whom the Nigerian government executed in 1995 for trying to stop Shell Oil from destroying the Ogoni people's homeland. —J.B.



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to a recent study from the Brookings Institution, it should be easy to get \$200 billion in savings over the next 10 years without compromising our national defense.

Finally, the budget deal pays homage to the supreme economic authority of Alan Greenspan and the Federal Reserve, whose stated policy is to hold down wages and employment levels to defend against phantom inflation. We need to restructure the Fed to make it accountable for its performance in promoting full employment and non-discriminatory lending, among other responsibilities. A democratic Fed could, among other good deeds, increase budget resources by lowering interest rates. For every tenth of a percentage point the government's interest cost is reduced, an extra \$50 billion is available over 10 years.

Balancing the program budget is easier than eliminating deficits altogether, but it does get more difficult in succeeding decades. The one and only cause of projected deficit growth is federal health care spending. However, private and public spending on health care are both growing too fast for the economy to sustain. The solution, however, is not privatizing Medicare and Medicaid spending, which will only bankrupt family budgets rather than public budgets. Comprehensive reform of the U.S. health care system is the inescapable fiscal and economic imperative for the long term.

There is now literally a dime's worth of difference between Clinton and the Republican majority in Congress, but there are a trillion dollars of possibilities over the coming decade. A humane and forward-looking fiscal discipline is within reach. If the Democratic Party doesn't catch on, somebody else will.

—Max B. Sawicky

The next Reich?

Alexis Herman takes over at the Department of Labor, having survived an organized effort to hold her nomination hostage. After months of deadlock, GOP senators gave up their bid to force Clinton to scrap an executive order encouraging government contractors to use union labor.

This episode of partisan politics notwithstanding, however, Herman's nomination was far from controversial. She has been an inside player in Washington for many years. During the Carter administration, she set up and ran training programs in the South and headed the Labor Department's Women's Bureau. Before Clinton was elected, she served as a staffer at the Democratic National Committee. Most recently, she served as director of the White House Office of Public Liaison.

By nominating Herman, Clinton not only brought an African-American woman into the cabinet, he also paid a political debt to civil rights groups, especially in the South, who campaigned for her. In the end, so did the AFL-CIO, although it originally supported former Pennsylvania Sen. Harris Wofford. Herman could help strengthen ties between unions and the African-American community, which would help labor rebuild its strength through coalition-building and organizing.

Bill Lucy, secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, predicts that Herman will be an important voice in the debate over the fall-

out from welfare reform. He expects her to argue that workfare recipients, forced into the work force by the hundreds of thousands, have the same status and union rights as other workers. She has also historically supported affirmative action, he points out.

"Robert Reich had an academic background," Lucy says. "Herman brings more of a people perspective, from a generation that had a lot of experience of inadequate government protection."

Herman will take over a Department of Labor that has bent over backward to accommodate employers. Though he now seeks to distance himself lovingly from the Clinton administration after leaving it, Reich was nevertheless a good Clintonian during his stewardship. Unions, he believed, were best when they sought to cooperate rather than fight. During its first four years, the administration generally ignored the major class battles in Decatur, Detroit and elsewhere.

The quintessential Reich creation was the Dunlop Commission, ostensibly created in response to union pressure to reform labor law, now skewed drastically in favor of employers. Taking its cue from high-tech employers, Reich's commission was a mouthpiece for labor/management cooperation schemes. Ironically, but to no one's surprise, Republicans seized on its endorsement of cooperation and passed the Team Act, which would have legalized company unions. In the end, with the presidential campaign looming, Clinton and Reich switched directions, and the president vetoed the bill.

Reich also shied away from calling employers on the carpet. Unwilling to make an example of big-label garment manufacturers who abuse sweatshop labor, he instead introduced an honor roll for good employers. It included companies like jeans maker Guess Inc., which was finally removed for violating workers' rights and moving production from Los Angeles to Mexico, as well as Levi's and Jessica McClintock, targets of community-led protest. The "good company" approach led to Reich's final creation, the sweatshop code of conduct. It gave the seal of approval to 60-hour work-weeks, hunger wages and the labor of teenagers, as long as these practices remain safely beyond the border.

Reich has to be credited for some good things, however. He campaigned for the increase in the minimum wage, which helped to put economic issues on the agenda of the

1996 election. He also secured the appointments of National Labor Relations Board Chair William Gould and General Counsel Fred Firestein, who have avoided bias in favor of employers.

Herman, like Reich, has little direct labor experience. During her stint at the DNC, she worked most closely with Ron Brown, who later as Commerce Secretary promoted the marketing efforts and investments of U.S. corporations. The Clinton ideology of labor/management cooperation and unwillingness to oppose large corporations were not Reich's ideas alone. They pervade the entire administration, from its leader on down. A departure from this agenda by Herman, therefore, is not only unlikely, it would not be tolerated.

—David Bacon

Contributors

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THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



T H E F I R S T S T O N E

THIS MAD PIG WENT TO MARKET

By Joel Bleifuss

Some pigs in the United States may be infected with a porcine form of mad cow disease, according to an alarming study by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) scientists that has recently come to light. This previously unrecognized form of the disease in swine may be infecting humans, according to epidemiological studies that link pork consumption with mad cow's human equivalent, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD).

In late 1978, Dr. Masuo Doi, a veterinarian with the Food Safety and Quality Service, observed signs of a mysterious central nervous system (CNS) disorder in some young hogs that had arrived at the Tobin Packing Plant in Albany, N.Y., from several Midwestern states. For the next 15 months, Doi studied 106 of the afflicted pigs. He described their symptoms this way: "Excitable or nervous temperament to external stimuli such as touch to the skin, handling and menacing approach to the animals is a common characteristic sign among swine affected with the disease." These symptoms, Doi now notes, are strikingly similar to those of British cattle infected with mad cow disease, which is scientifically known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

Doi sent brain material from these pigs to Karl Langheinrich, the head pathologist at the USDA's Eastern Laboratory in Athens, Ga. In a November 1979 report, Langheinrich noted that one pig's brain exhibited what the veterinary reference work *Pathology of Domestic Animals* defined as "the classical hallmarks of viral infection of the central nervous system." Langheinrich went on to report that the damage in the pig's brain was similar to the damage observed in the brains of sheep afflicted with scrapie and of mink afflicted with transmissible mink encephalopathy, the two other variants of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) known at the time.

In March of this year, Dr. William Hadlow, a retired veterinary pathologist who is one of the world's leading TSE researchers, examined the microscope slides of pig brain

from Doi and Langheinrich's 1979 investigation. The pig "could have suffered from a scrapie-like disease," he reports, but adds that such a conclusion cannot be "justified by the limited microscopic findings, however suggestive of a TSE they may be."

The Government Accountability Project (GAP), a Washington-based organization that supports public-sector whistleblowers, has been working with Doi to alert the public that a porcine form of mad cow disease may be circulating in the American pig population. In a March 27 letter to Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, GAP points out that if we assume a similar incidence of central nervous system disorders in swine being slaughtered nationwide as that found among swine at the Tobin Packing Plant,

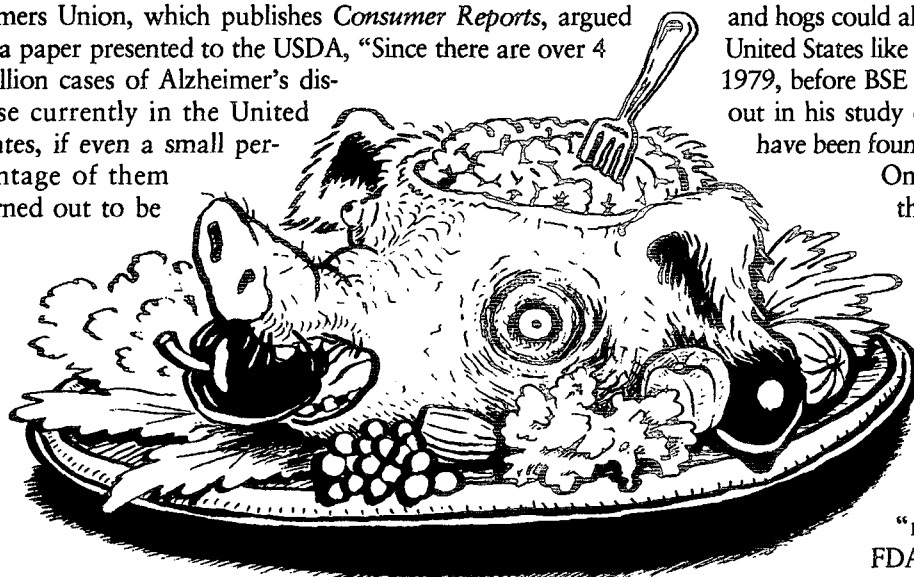
"it is reasonable to question whether, since at least 1979, USDA has been allowing 99.5 percent of animals with encephalitis, meningitis and other CNS disorders into the human food supply."

And what happens once those thousands of diseased pigs are eaten by the American public? Two epidemiological studies found pork to be a dietary risk factor in Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). A 1973 study published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* discovered that 14 of 38 CJD patients (36 percent) ate brains. Further, of those who ate brains, most (10 of the 14) preferred hog brains. Another study published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* in 1989 looked at how frequently 26 CJD patients ate 45 separate food items. Nine of these foods were found to be statistically linked to increased risk of CJD. Of those nine, six came from pigs—roast pork, ham, hot dogs, pork chops, smoked pork and scrapple. (The three that were not pig-derived were roast lamb, raw oysters/clams and liver.) The authors of the study concluded: "The present study indicated that consumption of pork as well as its processed products (e.g. ham, scrapple) may be considered as risk factors in the development of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. While scrapie has not been reported in pigs, a subclinical form of the disease or a pig reservoir for the scrapie might conceivably exist."

The number of Americans who develop CJD in a given year is in dispute. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) claims that the human form of mad cow disease occurs at a rate of one in a million. Further, ignoring evidence of a new variant of CJD found in Britain, the CDC maintains that people who eat an infected animal cannot contract the disease. In January, CDC Assistant Director for Public Health Lawrence Schonberger told a congressional hearing, "The bottom line from our perspective is that it's a theoretical risk ... but it is not as yet really a real risk."

But does the CDC really know how many Americans con-

tract CJD? Evidence indicates that CJD may often be misdiagnosed, and thus go unreported. A 1989 study at the University of Pittsburgh autopsied the brains of 54 patients who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and discovered that three of the patients (5.5 percent of the sample) actually had CJD. A 1989 study at Yale University reported similar findings. Postmortem examination of 46 patients who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's revealed that six (13 percent of the sample) actually had CJD. The New York-based Consumers Union, which publishes *Consumer Reports*, argued in a paper presented to the USDA, "Since there are over 4 million cases of Alzheimer's disease currently in the United States, if even a small percentage of them turned out to be



CJD, there could be a hidden CJD epidemic."

Which brings us to the issue of what the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is doing to address this food-borne threat to public health. In the past several months, in response to questions about Doi's 1979 pig research, USDA officials have put out a good deal of misinformation to public-interest groups, the media and even the National Association of Federal Veterinarians. On repeated occasions, officials have said that the slides of the pig brains from the 1979 study were unavailable because they had been sent to scientists in England who were studying mad cow disease. But, it turns out, the USDA never sent any slides to England.

"Agency officials repeatedly misrepresented scientists' investigations and conclusions to consumer groups and government employees and neglected to keep other agencies also working on TSE issues informed," says Felicia Nestor of GAP. "The USDA had to be pushed to investigate scientific evidence which only they had."

The USDA's lackluster response to this public health threat comes as no surprise. For years, the agency has done its best to ignore evidence that a distinct American strain of mad cow disease may already afflict the U.S. cattle population. (See "The First Stone," May 31, 1993 and April 15, 1996.) Veterinary researchers in Mission, Texas, in 1979 and Ames, Iowa, in 1992 found that cattle injected with brain matter from scrapie-infected American sheep developed BSE. However, the brains of these infected cattle did not exhibit the spongy holes found in the brains of their

BSE-plagued British cousins. Furthermore, cows afflicted with this American strain of scrapie-induced BSE do not go mad; they simply collapse and die.

The distinction is important because the American strain of the disease leads to symptoms that resemble what happens to the 100,000 American cattle that succumb to "downer cow syndrome" each year. Veterinary researchers fear that the widespread practice of feeding downer cows (in the form of rendered protein feed supplements) to other cattle, sheep and hogs could already be fueling a TSE epidemic in the United States like the one that plagued Britain. In fact, in 1979, before BSE was discovered in Britain, Doi pointed out in his study of deranged pigs that "many animals have been found to be 'downers' at first observation."

On January 3, the FDA, which is part of the USDA, finally drafted a rule that would ban the fortifying of animal feeds with "any mammalian tissue."

USDA researchers, critical of the government's foot-dragging, have been calling for such a ban for seven years. But undercutting this important step, the FDA has played a taxonomic shell game and arbitrarily removed pigs from the class "mammalia." Consequently, if the FDA's proposed rule is adopted, animals

being fattened for slaughter will stop eating cow renderings and instead eat only pig remains. Since mad cow disease in Britain was spread by feeding mad cows to healthy cows, the FDA's pigs-are-not-mammals proposal gives any porcine form of mad cow disease a point of entry into the human food chain.

On April 28, Consumers Union filed comments with the FDA on the agency's proposed regulations. The group advocates a complete ban on the use of all mammalian protein in all feed intended for food animals, as is now the case in England. "The draft rule," says Consumers Union, "is not adequate to protect public health, because it would continue to leave the door open for a porcine TSE to contaminate pork and other meat."

It would be nice if the USDA were as concerned about protecting public health as it is about the financial health of the \$30 billion-a-year pork industry and the \$60 billion-a-year beef industry. Ditto for the *Wall Street Journal*, where editors have put on hold a story by a staff reporter on mad pig disease and the possible link between pork consumption and CJD.

ABC's *World News Tonight* has also sat on this information for a couple of weeks. On May 12, the network did air a story that examined the fact that CJD was being misdiagnosed as Alzheimer's. But the network failed to note that CJD is the human form of mad cow disease. The network also neglected to mention the possible connection to pork or the fact that the CJD patient featured in its story, Marie Farris, had been employed at a packing plant where she handled slaughtered pigs.

E N V I R O N M E N T

Fishy business

Giant factory trawlers are wiping out independent boat operators and wreaking havoc on the marine ecosystem.

By Jeffrey St. Clair

The massive trawler *Gijon* cuts through the slate-colored swells, trailing a white V in the waters of the Bering Sea. The ship lowers its giant pelagic net from the stern and unfurls it into the dark waters below. The net, made from thousands of yards of lightweight nylon mesh, sweeps in a lethal curtain across the depths, ensnaring everything in its path.

Hours later, the nets are cranked up to the piercing whine of straining engines. Inside is an amazing trove: more than 400 tons of fish, crabs and squid. A few Steller's sea lions and fur seals, indiscriminately snared while foraging for salmon, are also part of the haul.

The sea lions and seals, of course, are not spared. Indeed, more than 40 percent of the haul is considered worthless by-catch and will simply be ground up and spewed in bloody torrents from the bilges of the ship back into the sea. A

staggering 550 million pounds of marine life are wasted in this way in the North Pacific every year.

The Bering Sea is now the most productive fishery in North America, pulling in about \$2 billion a year. More than one-third of the United States' commercial catch comes from these frigid waters up north. Among the species sought by the fishing fleets of the North Pacific are yellowfin sole, herring, halibut and perch. But the most cherished target is pollock, the tofu of fish, which accounts for about a third of the catch. The Japanese crave pollock for surimi, processed fish that is stuffed inside crab legs. Pollock also turns up in American markets as fish sandwiches at Burger King and McDonald's and as imitation crab in the fish freezers at Safeway.

The *Gijon* is registered to the Seattle-based American Seafoods Corporation, a subsidiary of Resource Group International, a Norwegian conglomerate. The ship is a floating factory, longer and wider than a football field. The \$40 million trawler can process 80 tons of fish product a day, turning yellowfin sole into fish meal and manufacturing pollock into surimi. The catch is stored in huge freezers, where—through the magic of modern cryogenics—it can stay preserved for months.

Resource Group International's primary competitor in the lucrative pollock fishing grounds of the North Pacific is the Arctic-Alaska Fisheries Company, another Seattle-based firm. Arctic-Alaska was acquired in 1992 by Don Tyson, the chicken mogul and Clinton intimate from Springdale, Ark. Since then, Tyson has gobbled up three other Alaska seafood operations and is fending off anti-trust investigations by the Federal Trade Commission.

The incursion of the big factory ships into the waters of the North Pacific began in the late '70s and early '80s. There are now 45 of these factory trawlers operating in the Bering Sea. Supercharged diesel engines fed by massive fuel tanks permit the ships to remain at sea for months without returning to home ports to refuel or off-load their catch. The processed surimi is often simply off-loaded at sea to smaller ships owned by Japanese fish merchants. The long range of the factory ships allows them to operate in several distant fisheries in one season. In this way, they can evade the catch quotas that saddle smaller operators.

The arrival of the industrialized super-trawlers presaged a cultural and economic disaster for the communities of coastal Alaska. For decades, the flourishing Alaskan fishing industry was made up largely of independent ship owners and small processing plants, sprinkled down the coast in towns like Kodiak, Cordova and Ketchikan.

In the '70s, small operators made nearly 80 percent of the Alaskan pollock catch. Now the situation is almost entirely reversed. The factory trawlers take more than 70 percent of



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the pollock, and dozens of independent boat owners have gone bankrupt. But it's the shore-based factories making value-added fish products that have been hit the hardest by the new generation of trawlers. The canneries, surimi plants and frozen-fish processing factories provided year-round high-wage jobs, an important stabilizing force for rural Alaska's predominantly seasonal economy. Today, many of those plants and jobs are gone, replaced by operations aboard the factory trawlers, which increasingly employ Mexican and Vietnamese laborers at sweatshop wages.

Many of Arctic-Alaska's ships now off-load their catch not in Seattle but in Shanghai, where Tyson purchased a huge fish factory in 1994 from the Chinese government. The deal was brokered with the help of then Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and was backed by government insurance and loan guarantees from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. In fact, the U.S. Treasury has heavily underwritten the growth of the American factory-trawler fleet, thanks to effective inside work by the congressional delegation from Washington state. Tyson's company alone received more than \$65 million in low-interest government loans to fund the construction of 10 factory trawlers over the past decade. The Seattle-based factory-trawler fleet has

received \$200 million in so-called Fisheries Obligation Guarantees and other federal subsidies.

The invasion of the trawlers into southeast Alaska has also unleashed an ecological catastrophe in the waters of the Bering Sea and the North Pacific. Using sophisticated sonar and electronic tracking devices, factory trawlers like the *Gijon* can quickly locate new spawning grounds and fish them to near extinction. An outrageous example of this practice, called pulse trawling, occurred in the '80s in the Shelikof Strait off the Aleutian Islands, when a newly discovered pollock stock was relentlessly fished to the point of collapse. According to a report on factory trawlers by Greenpeace, in less than a decade the Shelikof pollock fishery had declined from an estimated biomass of 3 million tons in 1981 to less than 300 thousand tons in 1988.

Each year since the factory trawlers have flocked to the Alaska waters, the pollock season has closed earlier than planned. In the late '70s, the pollock fishing season regularly ran for 10 months. In 1994, it closed after 70 days. It's not surprising, since the annual harvest capacity of the trawler fleet may be greater than the entire pollock population of the Bering Sea. According to an internal assessment by executives from American Seafoods Corporation, "the

If the radioactive sole doesn't kill you ...

Thousands of tons of perch, pollock and black sole taken by ships like the *Gijon* may be radioactive, according to a recent report by Greenpeace. The story dates back to 1971, during the glory days of the Nixon administration and the nuclear saber-rattling leading up to Kissinger's detente with the Soviets. In order to send a message of "American resolve," Nixon ordered the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense to detonate the largest underground nuclear explosion in U.S. history on Amchitka Island, a volcanic extrusion in the Bering Sea halfway down Alaska's Aleutian chain.

The five-megaton hydrogen "device," which was set off on November 6, 1971, exploded with such force that the middle of the island collapsed, forming, what that mad scientist Edward Teller delicately termed, "a nuclear excavated lake." In the wake of the blast, hundreds of dead puffins were found with their legs driven through their chests, while sea lions, resting on sea rocks miles from the test site, were discovered with their eyes blown out of their sockets. Within months, there was ample evidence that the site, called Cannikan Lake, had begun to steadily leak radioactive waste, despite assurances from James Schlesinger, then head of the Atomic Energy Commission, that it would take "a thousand years or more" for transuranic radiation to dribble into the sea.

catching capacity of vessels operating in the Bering Sea pollock fishery appears to be double or triple the annual quota." Moreover, most marine biologists believe these quotas are dangerously inflated.

It's not just the commercial fish species such as pollock and sole that are being depleted. Crab, halibut and arrowtooth flounder are also in trouble. The consequences extend to the wider ecosystem, including fish-eating seabirds, such as puffins, thick-billed murrelets and black-legged kittiwakes, and marine mammals, such as Steller's sea lions and fur seals. For example, pollock accounts for nearly 70 percent of the rare sea lion's diet. A recent report by the National Research Council warns, "It seems extremely unlikely that the productivity of the Bering Sea ecosystem can sustain current rates of human exploitation as well as the large populations of all marine mammal and bird species that existed before human exploitation—especially modern exploitation—began."

The trend toward over-exploitation of the Alaskan fishery will be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse. For one thing, even the strongest federal fishing laws have

Thousands of recently declassified documents released by the Department of Energy to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation reveal that the Amchitka test began to leak iodine 131 and crypton 85 within two days of the blast, escaping into groundwater and then the sea through underground fissures in the island. Soon after these documents were disclosed, Sen. Ted Stevens, the Alaska Republican, discreetly told Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary at a Senate committee hearing, "Madam Secretary, we've got a problem up here. There's leaking from the Amchitka test site and it might endanger our North Pacific fisheries."

High levels of americium, plutonium and tritium are now showing up in plant samples on the island. "If we're finding these levels of radioactive waste, then the potential for severe harm is there," says Pam Miller, a Greenpeace biologist who authored a recent report on the Amchitka situation. "This stuff appears to be leaking into the most important commercial fishery in the world."

Even so, executives at Tyson remain nonplussed. "We've never once found any radioactive fish," said a spokesman for Arctic-Alaska. Moments later, however, the PR man admitted that the company had never tested its fish for radioactivity and had no plans to start. No wonder the surrealists adopted the fish as a symbol of their movement. —J.S.

often only exacerbated the problem. Take the Magnuson Act, passed in 1976 to protect American offshore fishing grounds from growing incursions by foreign fishing fleets. The controversial measure, rammed through Congress by then Sen. Warren Magnuson (D-WA), extended the federal government's jurisdiction over fish matters from three miles to 200 miles off the U.S. coastline.

The Japanese and the Norwegians bitterly denounced the move as an example of ecological imperialism. In fact, it

Continued on page 36

... the PCB-laced perch will.

Medical researchers, backed by hefty grants from companies like Arctic-Alaska, continue to churn out reports touting the health-enhancing benefits of a diet laden with pollock, salmon and perch. Fish seems to lower bad cholesterol, reduce heart disease (especially for men) and suppress the advance of free radicals, those frenzied compounds that stimulate cancer-cell growth.

All this is undoubtedly true. Yet, there are also health dangers associated with fish consumption. Fish is sometimes contaminated with heavy metals, pesticides and other chemical toxins. One recent study estimates that consumption of PCB-laced fish from the Great Lakes may lead to 40,000 cancer deaths over the next 25 years. Seafood products can also carry a host of food-borne pathogens, including listeria, vibrio vulnificus and, yes, salmonella. Testing of fish for such dangers is even more lax and rudimentary than that in the beef industry. One local seafood merchant in Portland, Ore., says, "What it comes down to is smell. When it starts to stink, we take it off the shelf. What else can you do?" What else, indeed? —J.S.

L A B O R

Strawberry fields forever

Thirty-year-old Delfina Corcoles, a native of Mexico, has made her living since she was 18 by picking strawberries in the fertile fields of California's central coast. For nearly six years, she worked without missing a day or receiving a single reprimand at Gargiulo, Inc., one of the nation's largest growers and shippers of fresh strawberries. Shortly after Corcoles became a union advocate, foremen slapped her with two "tickets" for bad work, one shy of the number needed to fire her. Then this spring, even as the company hired inexperienced workers, it did not call her back to work. The message was clear: If you join the union, your job is in jeopardy.

The UFW strawberry campaign has become the moral center of a re-energized labor movement.

By David Moberg
WATSONVILLE, CALIF.

"This is the problem with the right to organize in this country," argues Richard Bensinger, the AFL-CIO director of organizing. "It's not unique, but the level of arrogance of the strawberry

growers is unprecedented." The AFL-CIO has thrown its full support behind the United Farm Workers (UFW) campaign to organize the 20,000 mostly Latino immigrant laborers in California's \$550 million strawberry industry. The federation is investing money and its own organizers in the campaign both to make a broad public statement about the right to organize and to inspire other unions to undertake more ambitious organizing projects.

Though the strawberry industry is growing rapidly and rakes in steady profits, strawberry pickers toil in dismal conditions. There are often no bathrooms on site, and drinking water comes only from irrigation pipes. During the height of the season, workers put in 12-hour days bent over long rows of strawberry plants. "If we stood up, we would be fired," Corcoles says. The industry has received four times the state average for farm-labor and safety citations.

Except for tree fruit pickers, strawberry pickers are the lowest-paid group of farm workers in California. The average strawberry picker makes about \$8,500 a year, a decline in real wages of roughly 25 percent over the past 20 years, according to Don Villarejo of the independent California Institute for Rural Studies. Making matters worse, there is little affordable housing. Several families routinely crowd into a small house, or workers rent parked cars or closets as shelter.

The UFW began its current effort to organize strawberry workers last year around Watsonville, where half of the nation's fresh strawberries are grown. The Teamsters and the United Food and Commercial Workers, both of which clashed with the UFW in the past, are now collaborating with the UFW on the strawberry campaign.

The campaign reflects the UFW's return to its organizing roots. In the '80s, UFW founder César Chávez turned away from organizing, and the UFW membership slumped from 80,000 at its peak in the mid-'70s to 20,000 in 1994. Since then, the UFW has devoted 40 percent of its budget to organizing. The effort has paid off. The union has won 14 straight union elections (but only six contracts so far) and its ranks have edged up to 25,000.

After watching three strawberry farms plow under their fields following union victories, the UFW decided that it had to organize the entire industry, not individual growers. The union has adopted the slogan, "Five Cents for Fairness." Giving strawberry pickers five cents more for a one-pound box, the union argues, would increase workers' average piece rate by 50 percent. That would boost average wages, now around \$6.44 an hour, to \$8.19 an hour.

UFW Secretary-Treasurer Dolores Huerta visited strawberry pickers' home towns in Mexico last winter, drumming up support. Now organizers are going house to house, talking with farm workers. Besides the core of 50 UFW organiz-



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ers, there are hundreds of workers involved in ranch committees, the informal nucleus of union supporters at each major worksite who encourage fellow workers to back the union. In April, about 200 Latino organizers from dozens of other unions also volunteered. "This is a privilege and honor to come here," says 30-year-old Service Employees International Union organizer Ramiro Hernández from Denver. "I grew up with the farm worker struggle, and my father took me to march with César Chávez."

The union hopes public pressure will sway the industry, making a boycott unnecessary. The AFL-CIO is encouraging state and city labor councils and religious, environmental and civil rights allies to get supermarkets to sign statements declaring that strawberry workers have the right to a decent wage and working conditions. Chains accounting for a total of 2,100 stores—most recently the national giant A&P—have signed on so far. On April 13, nearly 30,000 farm workers, unionists and other supporters descended on Watsonville for a huge rally.

The UFW and its partner unions are also stepping up the pressure on the legal front. They are suing Gargiulo and its parent, the St. Louis-based Monsanto Co., for forcing strawberry workers to do millions of dollars of work without pay, including setting up operations before picking begins and packing berries at the end of the day. The UFW has also charged growers with violating California Proposition 65, which regulates use of toxic chemicals, by exposing workers to the dangerous pesticide captan. The AFL-CIO and environmental groups have petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to change rules that permit grow-

ers to send strawberry pickers into fields without protection only 24 hours after captan spraying, even though other agribusinesses must wait 48 hours and provide protective clothing for their workers.

Farm worker strategists realize that organizing is also a political battle: Agricultural unionism is shaped not only by labor laws, but also by immigration policies. The AFL-CIO wants to force labor-backed Democrats to vigorously support farm workers' right to organize free of intimidation and regardless of immigration status.

Growers publicly insist that workers have a right to call for immediate union elections. The union, however, first wants the growers to pledge to be neutral in such elections. "Until growers say they'll honor workers' decisions without a threat to their economic livelihood, going into an election would be irresponsible," argues strawberry campaign coordinator Arturo Mendoza. Up until now, the industry has not been neutral. It has retained an anti-union public relations firm and organized a front group of workers opposed to the UFW.

In the long run, argues Villarejo from the Institute of Rural Studies, the UFW needs to bring all of the players who make money in the strawberry industry—shippers and coolers, big and small growers, and even grocery chains—into an industry-wide agreement. One possible model is the three-way agreements that the Ohio-based Farm Labor Organizing Committee negotiated among both pickle growers at Heinz and tomato growers at Campbell's.

In some respects, the strawberry industry is a good target

The rally for farm workers in Watsonville, Calif., in April.

for union organizing. First of all, the labor force is small enough to organize. Moreover, the industry won't shut down or leave the region since the climate of the central coast is ideal for growing strawberries. If workers act together, they do have power: Strawberries are extremely perishable if they are not picked, cooled and shipped promptly. The Teamsters represent 90 percent of workers at the companies that cool and ship strawberries. If the UFW needs to strike in order to force recognition, Teamster refusal to cross UFW picket lines could be extremely valuable.

Growers, unified for the time being, could divide over the issue of how hard to fight the union. Growers who seek a market advantage through improved quality and efficiency may part ways with those growers most willing to abuse workers and flout the law. "If there was a uniform wage across the industry, it would reward farms with better operations," muses Miles Reiter, a big strawberry and raspberry producer. "That would be beneficial to me. There's logic: The best survive, and it's better for workers."

In other respects, however, the industry is a challenge to organize. There are about 270 strawberry farms in the Watsonville area, but fewer than 30 growers control the majority of workers and production. Two-thirds of all farms have fewer than 25 acres and produce only 8 percent of all strawberries. Most of these small farms, where working conditions are often the worst, are owned by Mexican-Americans, many of them former farm workers or sharecroppers. These owners often have family or village ties with their workers, making organizing difficult. These Mexican-Americans who have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps—even if their boots are on the backs of fellow Mexicans—are used by the big commercial growers to gain sympathy for the industry. At the same time, growers on the big farms, where there aren't the same personal ties to workers, have been trying to persuade their often better-paid pickers that they have little to gain from joining a union.

There are other obstacles to organizing as well. The UFW has not had a strong presence among strawberry workers since a general strike in 1970. Many younger immigrant workers have limited knowledge of Chávez and the UFW. Some older farm workers had bad experiences with the union during the '80s, making them reluctant to jump on the organizing bandwagon. The individualized work of strawberry picking does not foster as much solidarity as crew-based farm work, such as picking fresh vegetables. The seasonal nature of the work doesn't help matters either.

But the biggest problem the union faces is overcoming fear among the workers. Gennaro Rivera, at 40 a veteran of 14 years in the strawberry fields, says he would like to vote for the union but is reluctant to because "sometimes when you're involved with the union, the boss doesn't want to give you a job."

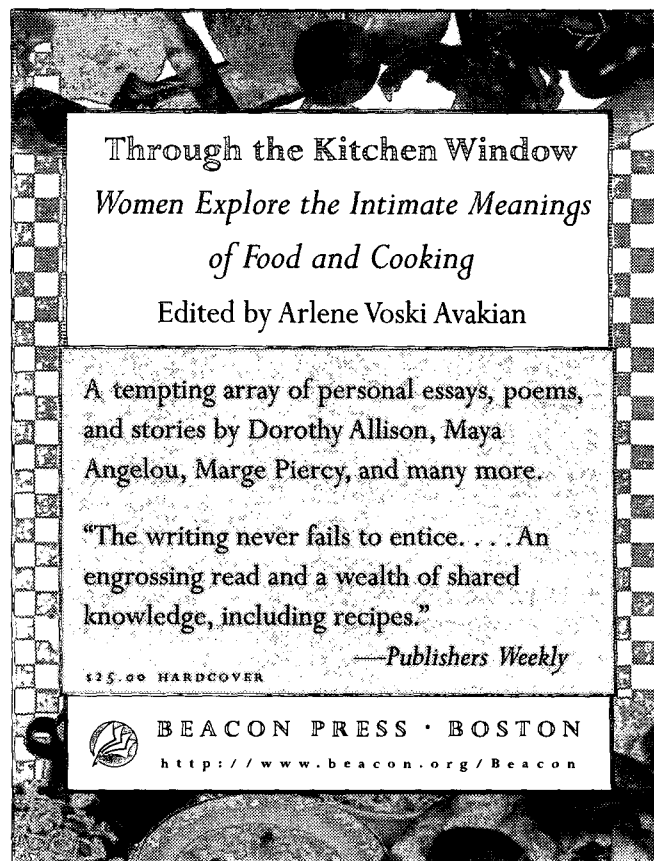
UFW President Arturo Rodríguez understands the challenge. "The job is the only thing the workers have," he says. "They're desperate, even more desperate if they migrate

because they have to pay several hundred dollars for some coyote to get them across the border. You just try to go to workers and explain: Your involvement in the union is not betraying a family member or grower. All you're trying to do is stand up for your rights, your future and your family."

The strawberry campaign, while very localized, has national strategic importance. If strawberry workers can win an industry-wide contract, it will be a big boost to farm worker organizing throughout the country, including a joint Teamster-UFW organizing drive under way in Washington state's apple orchards. Bensinger, the AFL-CIO's director of organizing, hopes that a successful strawberry campaign would lead to other efforts to organize by industry and region.

The UFW has long been a training ground for both labor and Latino organizers as well as a catalyst for progressive Latino politics. A big strawberry victory would encourage Latinos to organize in other industries, where they are a growing and critical potential constituency for unions across the country, from manufacturing to the service industries.

The farm workers' crusade has the potential to motivate union leaders and help reaffirm the labor movement as a moral force in society. If strawberry workers win, then workers and unions across the country may turn out to be even bigger winners. With the big AFL-CIO commitment, the stakes are high. As Miles Reiter, the grower, observes: "This has become the moral center of the attempt to re-energize the labor movement. It will be hard for them to walk away empty-handed."



A GRICULTURE

Sour milk

Karen Shaw and Forrest Foster milk 50 cows on their dairy farm in north-east Vermont. Foster was born a dairy farmer. During 34 years of milking cows seven days a week every morning and night, Foster says he's missed only four milkings. Though it's not been easy, Shaw and Foster have kept their farm in business for 16 years as they've watched neighboring farms go bankrupt, shut down or be auctioned off.

The dairy industry, one of the last bastions of the family farm, is going corporate.

By Jennifer Ferrara

For many years, the dairy industry seemed to be the lone hold-out from a trend of growing concentration and corporate control in U.S. agriculture. The U.S. poultry, beef and pork industries, for instance, are almost entirely vertically integrated, with a few billion-dollar agribusiness corporations owning and controlling nearly every aspect of production, from growing feed to slaughter and pack-

aging. Three corporations control almost 80 percent of beef production, while 30 hog farms raise one-quarter of the nation's pigs. By contrast, the 30 largest U.S. dairy farms produce only 3 percent of the nation's raw milk, according to a 1995 poll conducted by the industry trade journal *Successful Farming*.

But the family dairy farm is in danger of becoming a relic of the past. Dairy farms are going under at a rate of 5 percent a year. Since 1992, more than 25,000 dairy farmers have declared bankruptcy. Between July 1995 and July 1996 alone, 5,887 dairy farms shut down. Dairy farms are declining at a much faster rate than U.S. farms overall. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, from 1985 to 1995, the number of dairy farms dropped by 48 percent while the total number of U.S. farms declined by 10 percent. Currently, there are about 100,000 dairy farms in the United States.

Yet despite the disappearance of small farms, dairy cases in the nation's supermarkets are always well-stocked. In fact, the country is still producing a surplus of raw milk because as small farms go under, big dairy operations are getting bigger. In a vivid illustration of the changing face of the dairy industry, California replaced Wisconsin as the nation's top dairy-producing state three years ago. In Wisconsin, approximately 35,000 farmers milk an average of 50 cows each. In California, where the largest dairy operations own up to 14,000 cows, 2,500 farms milk an average of 400 cows each. Now that a precedent for factory farming in the dairy industry has been set, there is little to stop these large farms from driving family farms like Shaw and Foster's out of business.

The most immediate problem facing small farmers is low raw-milk prices. Just to pay all the bills and cover the cost of production, Shaw and Foster need to get \$18 for a hundred pounds of milk, but they currently get only \$13.94. The price below which the federal government's surplus-buying "safety net" kicks in is around \$10.20, about \$8 below what a small farmer needs to survive. Larger farms can make up for low prices by increasing volume, but small farms don't have—and many don't want—that option.

The root of the price problem is that most dairy farmers are locked into a national market designed to favor large dairy-processing companies rather than to sustain small farms. The change in the role of dairy co-operatives since the turn of the century illustrates this point.

Originally, farmers formed co-operatives in order to pool their product and gain power in the marketplace. Individually, farmers had little leverage against concentrated buyers and did not have the facilities to bottle and

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process milk, or to transport it to markets. The farmer invested in the co-operative, which in turn bought milk from the farmer, processed it, and sold the product. The co-operative's primary role was to represent farmers and look out for their financial interests. In 1922, Congress passed the Capper-Volstead Act, which gave legal sanction to farming co-operatives, allowing farmers to band together and demand prices without being subject to anti-trust laws.

The main purpose of some of today's dairy co-operatives is still to represent farmers, but others have used the law to become concentrated buyers themselves. Compare one of the country's most well-known organic co-operatives, the Coulee Region Organic Produce Pool (CROPP) in Wisconsin, with the country's huge commercial co-ops. CROPP, which has 150 farmer-owners and annual revenues of close to \$14 million, is committed to producing high-quality organic dairy products without pesticides and biotechnologies and to representing its farmers with the CROPP label. The co-op is truly farmer-owned; no policy is approved until it passes in farmer meetings held in different CROPP regions, and no outside investment is accepted. By contrast, the two largest co-ops, Mid-America Dairymen (with 12,200 members and revenues of \$4 billion) and the Associated Milk Producers, Inc. (with 8,200 members and revenues of \$2.2 billion), are interested primarily in pushing ever more massive amounts of milk through their facilities by acquiring large milk producers and subsidiary processing companies.

Co-ops only have to pay a fraction of their earnings back to their farmer-members and can retain the rest as interest-free money to use at their discretion for business operations

from expansion to executive salaries. Thus, it is in the interests of large co-ops to buy milk from their farmers at cheap prices, turn it into processed products like powdered milk and pizza cheese, and make the largest possible profits. Though farmer-members invest in their co-op with membership dues and may have some symbolic input in operations, in most large co-ops, they do not actually "own" the company if they are not also stockholders. The business end of dairying is conducted mostly in co-op offices and at board meetings, and kept largely out of farmers' hands. The problem comes when the interests of stockholders and management override the interests of farmers, resulting in regional monopolies that dictate the way farmers do business.

A relic of the past?

With multi-billion dollar processing and supermarket corporations standing between farmers and consumers, the spread between farm and retail prices is widening. While the price of dairy products at the grocery counter has climbed 15 percent in real terms over the last 15 years, the revenue that farmers receive for their milk has decreased by 15 percent over the same period. In 1995, farmers received only 42 percent of the retail price for raw milk while retailers took in roughly 25 percent, and wholesalers and processors received roughly 30 percent.

Not only do big dairy processors have national market forces on their side, but their foot is firmly in the doors of lawmakers. According to data from the Center for Responsive Politics, dairy PACs contributed \$1.68 million to federal election campaigns in 1995-96. The three largest contributors were the Associated Milk Producers, the Mid-

America Dairymen and the Milk Industry Foundation, one of the three branches of the National Dairy Foods Association, the industry's most powerful lobbying body. Contributions from these organizations totaled \$1.4 million, the majority of which went to candidates from the top 20 dairy-producing states.

New agribusiness technologies that facilitate mass production are also contributing to low milk prices and industry concentration. The most insidious technology to infiltrate the dairy industry is the Monsanto Co.'s recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH), the first mass-marketed product of the food biotechnology industry. rBGH, which came on the market in 1992, is an artificial hormone injected into cows that increases milk production by up to 20 percent. The drug is known to cause udder infections in cows, and evidence exists showing a possible link between rBGH and cancer in humans.

With its patent on this engineered hormone, Monsanto has a tight grip on the dairy industry and on the future of the world's dairy supply. The company estimates that approximately 10 percent of the nation's 9.5 million dairy cattle are being injected with the drug. Though some processing co-ops refuse to accept milk from farmers who use the artificial hormone, other giants such as the Midwest's Land O'Lakes and Agri-Mark in the Northeast, eager for higher production regardless of the costs, support the drug.

The Clinton administration has also helped pave the way for industry consolidation. The revolving door between industry and government operates in the dairy industry. For example, Michael Taylor, who had worked for the law firm hired by Monsanto to represent the company at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, became FDA deputy commissioner in 1991 and played a leading role in directing the federal agency's policy on rBGH. International trade agreements embraced by the administration will also likely take their toll on small dairy farming. According to Pete Hardin, publisher of *The Milkweed*, a monthly dairy report for dairy farmers out of Wisconsin, small and medium-sized farmers won't be able to compete

with lower milk prices abroad.

Though a large number of American dairy farmers remain on the agribusiness treadmill, some small farmers are organizing to defend their livelihood. They are focusing their efforts on developing new ways to price milk. One new national grass-roots farmers organization, the American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association (ARMPPA), is using the Capper-Volstead Act to organize farmers into bargaining collectives that would demand higher milk prices from co-ops and work with the processors to negotiate sales deals. The organization, based in Wisconsin, would like to see farmers, not processors, setting raw-milk prices. If a co-op refuses to pay the price that farmers demand, ARMPPA will move the milk away from that processor and sell it somewhere else. In order to succeed, ARMPPA has to acquire a critical mass of farmer support, which it calculates to be 20 percent of the nation's farmers. ARMPPA's weak point may be its dependence on existing co-ops and the national market. Though the organization is challenging the prices that farmers get for their milk, they are not questioning the larger issues of corporate control that make those prices necessary.

Other small farmers are doing all they can to stay out of the clutches of agribusiness corporations. Answering rising consumer demand for milk produced without pesticides and biotechnologies, organic dairy operations have increased dramatically in recent years. In 1996, sales of organic dairy products more than doubled. Farmers and sustainable farm organizations are experimenting with and implementing sustainable techniques such as intensive grazing methods that allow farmers to use their own resources instead of expensive chemical feed. Some small farmers are bypassing the national market entirely and processing their own products or joining small co-ops that sell their products almost exclusively to local markets.

Meanwhile, Shaw and Foster are avoiding "bigger and better" technologies. They keep bulls to breed their own cows, rather than using artificial breeding methods, grow hay to reduce feed bills, and do not use rBGH. In 1995, they took their co-op Agri-Mark to court in an attempt to hold it accountable to its farmer-members. Shaw and Foster wanted access to the company's books and information regarding executive salaries, but the court ruled that only Agri-Mark stockholders, not "farmer-owners," could be privy to such information. More recently, the couple organized (unsuccessfully) against the reappointment of Vermont's pro-agribusiness state agricultural commissioner, Leon Graves.

All told, the fight against the corporate onslaught is an uphill battle, but one that many small dairy farmers are prepared to wage. ◀

Jennifer Ferrara is the managing editor of *Food & Water Journal*, a quarterly publication of Food & Water, a national grass-roots environmental organization based in Walden, Vt.



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Grapes of wrath

W

*Racial
discrimination
at the
Department
of Agriculture
adds to the
already
daunting
challenges
facing black
farmers.*

By **Salim Muwakkil**

Willie L. Crute received an undisclosed but, in his lawyer's words, "substantial" settlement last month from the Department of Agriculture (USDA), resolving a three-year-old administrative complaint he had filed alleging that the agency delayed his loan application because he is African-American. Crute sought the loan to build a modern poultry house on his Baskerville, Va., farm in order to qualify to raise chickens under contract to Perdue Farms. When the USDA dragged its feet on the application, a white farmer snapped up the Perdue contract instead.

Crute is one of hundreds of black farmers who have filed administrative complaints or lawsuits over the last 25 years accusing the USDA of discrimination in its loan programs. In late April, black farmers demonstrated their anger at a protest in front of the federal agency's Washington, D.C., headquarters.

"It's time to speak out against the business-as-usual mentality of the USDA that threatens the very future of black family farms," said John W. Boyd Jr., president and founder of the National Black Farmers Association (NBFA) in a speech during the rain-soaked demonstration. "Black farmers are losing land at a rate of 9,000 acres a week as a direct result of USDA's bias in deciding loan applications. We can no longer afford to remain silent."

In 1920, 14 percent of American farmers were black. Since then, blacks have left farming at five times the rate of white farmers, according to Boyd. Today, 19,000 farmers—less than 1 percent of the country's 2 million farmers—are black. Black farms are generally small—the average is 50 to 100 acres—and most cultivate vegetables, although some grow cotton, peanuts and tobacco. Nearly 95 percent of black farms are located in the Southeast, with a few scattered throughout Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri.

Even USDA officials admit that discrimination has played a role in the decline in black farmers, but they cite it as one among many factors. For example, most black farmers lack sufficient technical training and own smaller and less efficient farms than their white counterparts. Moreover, young blacks tend to take little interest in farming. Finally, small farms in general are disappearing, USDA officials point out, because they can't compete with corporate agricultural enterprises. The impersonal logic of the free market tramples family farms without much consideration for race.

But racism exacerbates the problems of small black farmers, especially when it comes to financing, the lifeblood of farming. Loans are granted to farmers, based usually on their next crop, to cover their large operating expenses. If farmers cannot obtain the capital necessary to sow properly, they face financial ruin. The USDA is the lender of last resort for those lacking access to private credit. Because of the South's tradition of Jim Crow segregation, blacks historically have been shut out of the private financial markets and thus have been disproportionately dependent on USDA loans to stay afloat. Approximately 65 percent of all black farmers participate in USDA programs.

According to Boyd, the USDA provides loans to white farmers at lower interest rates than to blacks, grants loans to blacks later in the crop season than to whites, and often shelves black farmers' loan applications altogether. Local USDA officials have even altered some black farmers' loan requests to increase their likelihood of being rejected and accelerated others' repayment schedules without explanation, Boyd claims.

USDA investigators who probed the Crute case found that white farmers in his Virginia county typically waited 84 days for loan decisions, while black farmers had to wait an

average of 222 days. The investigation also disclosed that 84 percent of the white farmers had their loan applications approved, while only 56 percent of the black applicants were granted loans.

Several government studies have investigated and substantiated similar charges. An internal USDA investigation in 1970 found a general insensitivity toward civil rights and widespread nepotism and cronyism within the agency. In a 1982 report, the Civil Rights Commission described the persistent discrimination within the USDA and warned that black farmers would be extinct by the end of the century unless the federal government began placing an "adequate emphasis on dealing with the crisis facing black farmers." A 1983 USDA task-force report found that local officials were "rude and insensitive to black farmers," calculated black farmers' projected crop yields differently from those of white farmers and often rejected blacks for loans based on "computation errors." In 1990, a House committee issued a report titled: "The Minority Farmer, A Disappearing American Resource: Has the Farmers Home Administration Been The Primary Catalyst?" The report concluded that minority farmers have lost significant amounts of land and potential farm income as a result of discrimination by USDA programs.

The latest probe of racial bias within the agency was an internal task-force investigation initiated by Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman in 1996. Released this February, the task force's report criticized agency officials for "lack of management commitment" to civil rights. "USDA's employment and program delivery systems appear to operate without sufficient checks and balances," the task force concluded. "Agency heads have delegated responsibility for civil rights to agency civil rights directors who do not have the resources, or authority, to ensure compliance with civil rights laws and regulations."

Along with its harsh appraisal of the USDA's operations, the task force issued a list of 92 recommendations to redress racial inequities. Among its recommendations, the task force urged the USDA to strengthen its outreach efforts to minority customers, take action to remedy past discrimination, hold all managers accountable for recruiting diverse job applicants, and boost the funds in agency programs for small and disadvantaged businesses. Perhaps the most far-reaching of all its recommendations was the task force's call for the conversion of 12,000 nonfederal positions in the agency's county offices to federal employee status. This change, which has to be approved by Congress, would produce a more accountable work force—something the agency desperately needs.

The black farmers who showed up in Washington in April were warmly welcomed by USDA officials. In fact, Glickman and several top aides even participated in a spe-

cial hearing called by Rep. Maxine Waters, a California Democrat who heads the Congressional Black Caucus. At the hearing, Glickman acknowledged that the "biggest challenge we face at USDA—the one that's consumed the most of my time and commitment—has been civil rights." He pledged that "on my watch, we'll change the culture of the Department of Agriculture."

Glickman is not the first USDA chief to make such promises. His predecessor, Mike Espy, who is black, made



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similar high-profile efforts during his abbreviated 23-month tenure that ended in 1994. Espy increased overall minority employment at the agency and significantly enhanced racial diversity among the ranks of its senior executives, increasing black women from three to 10 and black men from 17 to 26. Espy also boosted agency contracts with disadvantaged businesses (a category that includes most black farms) by more than a third to \$190 million. Finally, he re-oriented the USDA's Rural Development Administration to make loans more available to minority businesses. Despite these

measures, critics complain, Espy failed to slow the flow of black farm failures or fundamentally change the racial dynamics within the 90,000-employee agency.

As part of his pledge to eradicate all discrimination in the USDA, Glickman appointed Pearlie Reed, who headed the task force, as acting assistant secretary for administration, with responsibility for implementing the group's recommendations—a duty Glickman pledged to fulfill by June 6. Although Glickman appears genuine in his desire to root out bias at the agency, Boyd is not impressed. "Things have not been going well since our April 23 demonstration," he said in a recent interview. "There are at least 1,500 cases that need settlement, and there's no way those cases can be settled by June 6." He said that many of the pending cases are similar to Crute's, but other farmers "would just settle for debt relief." Instead of moving ahead on settling the cases, Boyd said, the agency is becoming mired in investigations. And instead of implementing the task force's recommendation to convert county employees to federal employees, Glickman's operatives are using those same employees to investigate the pending cases.

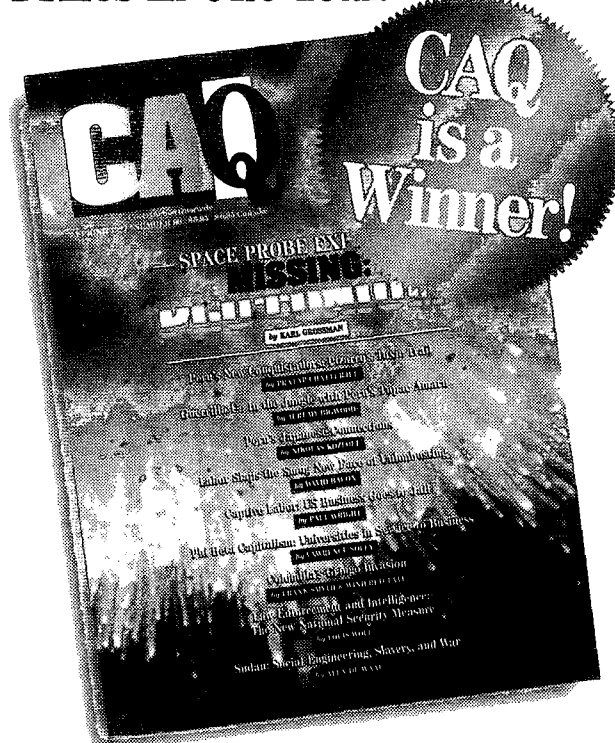
The NBFA is pushing for strict implementation of the recommendations as well as increased funding for the Socially Disadvantaged Applicant Program, an outreach effort to minority farmers authorized by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill. The program is designed to provide technical assistance for socially disadvantaged farmers, including African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and women. Although the program is authorized to receive \$10 million, less than \$1 million is currently budgeted for it, and key Republicans have moved to de-fund it altogether.

In the face of increasing congressional hostility, some black farmers are seeking other solutions. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, for example, develops co-operatives for small farmers. The idea is to encourage farmers to work together to improve agricultural production and marketing of crops, as well as to establish their own credit unions. The federation has grown to several thousand members in branches across the Southeast and operates a highly touted rural training center in Eps, Ala.

Among the Federation of Southern Cooperative's many promising enterprises is a joint venture with black-owned Glory Foods, Inc., which produces a popular line of canned soul food. The Columbus, Ohio-based company offers a specialty line of seasoned food products such as collard greens, black-eye peas, pinto beans, okra and sweet potatoes. Farmers associated with the federation are under contract to grow those crops. The relationship has worked well for both parties: Glory Foods has provided the farmers with training in contemporary agricultural methods and helped modernize their equipment—which has reduced the problem of quality control—and the small black farmers, usually at a commercial disadvantage, have a ready market.

If Glory added fried chicken to its product offerings, Willie Crute would be in good shape. ◀

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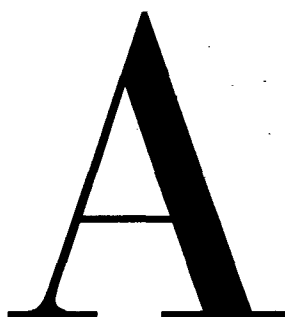
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T R A D E

Exporting misery



*U.S.
consumers
have
year-round
access to fruits
and vegetables
at the expense
of Central
American
peasants.*

**By Christopher Cook
and Peter Rosset**

At most neighborhood supermarkets, U.S. consumers can now buy a remarkable variety of fresh fruits and vegetables year-round: papayas, asparagus, broccoli, snow peas, squash, watermelon and pineapple. A good part of this produce comes from Central America, where the "free-trade-at-all-costs" ideology has struck with a vengeance, amply assisted by U.S. tax dollars.

Emerging from the '80s "lost decade" of war and economic collapse, Central American governments are angling for entry points into the global marketplace—and the U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S.AID), the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are aggressively paving the way.

Hoping to overcome economic stagnation and to add diversity to traditional agro-exports like bananas, coffee and sugarcane, these aid agencies have been pro-

moting nontraditional agricultural exports in Central America. The region's farmers and governments now find themselves competing for volatile niche markets in the United States. Traditional production of food crops for local consumption has been destabilized in the process.

The nontraditional agro-export strategy is a key part of trade liberalization and structural-adjustment policies. Starting in the '80s, international lending agencies placed strict conditions on their loans, forcing local governments to eliminate corn, bean and rice subsidies and to lower tariff barriers against cheap imports. U.S. grain donations and exports flooded Central America. The region's basic grain imports shot up by nearly 50 percent between 1988 and 1990.

This undercut local food production, the traditional economic base of rural life. Peasant farmers can no longer afford to produce local food crops. "Now the credit they give us for corn and beans doesn't cover the cost

of production, and the price we get doesn't even cover the credit," says Costa Rican campesino leader Carlos Campos. In nationwide protests against neoliberal economic policies, Costa Rican peasants have blocked highways and held government officials hostage.

With credits and markets for basic grains disappearing, Central American farmers had nowhere to turn save for U.S.AID enticements promoting nontraditional exports. But growing these capital-intensive crops for unproven markets has been a high-stakes gamble for peasants (see sidebar).

Independent analysts and even U.S.AID's own consultants describe the agency's agriculture policies as deeply flawed and dictated largely by U.S. corporate interests. Global market prices for traditional Central American exports have stagnated since the early '80s. Predicting that these crops would generate little economic growth or employment, U.S.AID analysts adopted an export-diversification plan promoting virtually any nontraditional crop, giving little consideration to regional suitability or broader socioeconomic impact.

In effect, if not by intent, the nontraditional-export strategy and structural-adjustment policies destabilized traditional Central American farming while creating new markets for transnational agricultural inputs such as pesticides, fertilizers and hybrid seeds. While the nontraditional-export program's stated aim was to reduce poverty, it ended up further eroding the precarious economic foothold of small-scale farmers.

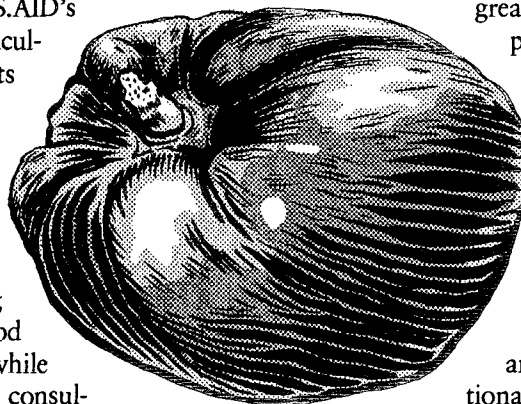
At every stage of production and export, nontraditional crops heavily favor large-scale, wealthier farmers. New seeds, pesticides, equipment and knowledge are required to produce these pest-sensitive, perishable crops. In Guatemala, for example, the initial investment to plant nontraditional-export crops ranges from five to 15 times higher than tradi-

tional corn and beans. With Central American debts mounting, credit has become increasingly inaccessible for nontraditional-export production—except for large-scale and corporate farmers, who benefit from tax breaks and credits from U.S.AID and Central American banks.

In the context of globalization, U.S.AID's restructuring of Central American agriculture has shifted the lion's share of its profits to U.S. and transnational input suppliers, import and export brokers, and packers and shippers. Global capital mobility has so far done its greatest damage to small farmers, turning many of them into poorly paid farm workers. In the emerging global food-chain hierarchy, small food producers are on the bottom rung, while import and export brokers, technical consultants and marketing specialists occupy more profitable posts. Nontraditional exports require technical assistance from those experienced in the particular crops, as well as import and export brokers and marketers who can generate sales in competitive, rapidly changing consumer markets.

The commodity chain of melons in El Salvador reveals just how deep the revenue disparities are between peasant farmers and the other parts of the business. Farmers take in just 0.6 percent of melon's market price, whereas 76.6 percent goes for U.S. import services such as shipping, wholesaling, advertising and retailing.

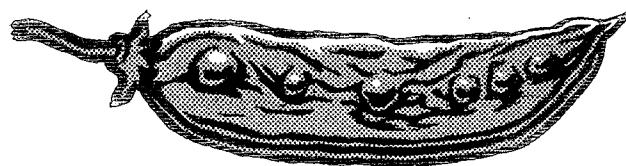
The push toward U.S.-bound nontraditional exports has bolstered profits and consolidated the dominance of integrated agribusiness corporations in the high value-added segments of exporting and marketing. The most blatant example is in Central American pineapple production, where Del Monte exports 95 percent of Costa Rican harvests, and Dole handles 96 percent of the Honduras crop. In virtually every nontraditional crop throughout Costa Rica and Honduras, the three largest enterprises export more than half of the total harvest. And in several crops, including pineapple, chayote, papaya and cacao, a single firm controls more than 50 percent of exports.



In this context, what alternative strategies might be employed to ensure economic and food security for Central Americans? Promising signs of alternative production and trade are emerging from the grass roots. Organic foods, although currently still a niche market, hold great potential as an economically viable pursuit for small farmers. Labor-intensive and requiring fewer and cheaper inputs, organic farming offers advantages for family farmers who have little capital and cannot afford expensive equipment and pesticides. The once-tiny market for organic foods is booming—U.S. retail sales increased five-fold between 1980 and 1988 alone. Unlike niche nontraditional products such as macadamia nuts, organic foods represent an emerging market with rising demand and prices that are not likely to bottom out any time soon.

There is also an urgent need to revitalize Central American basic grain production for subsistence and regional and local markets. When farmers produce for local markets, there is a healthier, more sustainable relationship between grower and consumer. Locally oriented agriculture enables communities to meet their food needs and puts farmers in a better position to negotiate fair prices with local buyers.

Strategic protectionism by Central American governments, though strenuously resisted by free-trade politicians and their corporate allies, seems an increasingly appropriate response to the region's economic instability and inequities. But given the bias of national and international policies in favor of transnational corporate interests, the real answer may lie in community-based organizing and development.



A cautionary tale

A 1983 U.S.AID project in the Guácimo district of Costa Rica provides a cautionary tale of the pitfalls of pushing exports at all costs. Investing money, credit, technical assistance and marketing expertise, U.S.AID encouraged poor farmers at the El Indio land settlement to switch from traditional yellow corn production to cocoa, tuber crops and ayote squash for export to the growing Latino market in the United States. In the project's first season, farmers were provided with imported, disease-free seed, a full-time extension agent and an advance purchase contract. In the first year, the participating farmers earned up to 40 times more per hectare than their neighbors who continued growing corn.

But just one year later, the El Indio venture began to unravel. The nontraditional-export project no longer provided seeds, there was no marketing contract, and the extension agent was only employed part-time. Still, enticed by the previous year's success, more farmers took the plunge. The results were disastrous. Crop prices dropped as global competition stiffened. Because low-grade seeds were used the second year, much of the harvest was hit by disease and none but a small portion of the crops could be sold. Half of the farmers defaulted on their credit, and the 40 who persisted defaulted the following year.

—C.C. & P.R.

If Central America is to avert greater poverty and mass migration of peasants to overcrowded cities both in the region and in the United States, agrarian reform is essential. Historically, land redistribution has saddled Central American peasants with poor land, giving them little chance of sustenance and economic survival. Governments need to introduce agrarian reform that would redistribute land to farmers producing for local and regional markets. These reforms must be buttressed by programs that enable small farmers to succeed in competitive markets by providing fair credit and prices, together with marketing and technical assistance.

In at least one case in the early '90s, peasant resistance forced change in this direction. Employees of state farms in Nicaragua, threatened by the privatization plans of then President Violeta Chamorro, armed themselves and insisted on retaining land ownership. Following a standoff between peasant farmers and police and army soldiers, a compromise allowed the farmers to keep 25 percent of the operation, while another quarter was given as co-operatives to former Sandinista army and contra soldiers. These farms sit on some of Nicaragua's best cotton and coffee lands.

In the Chimaltenango region of Guatemala, an agriculturally vibrant area hammered by economic decline and counterinsurgent violence in the '80s, indigenous communities are creating their own solutions. The Cakchiquel Coordinating Group for Integrated Development has helped small-scale farmers produce pesticide-free crops for local consumption. Campesino researchers

have developed indigenous insecticides and fungicides made of tree-bark extracts and boiled weeds—doubling farmers' yields of traditional corn crops.

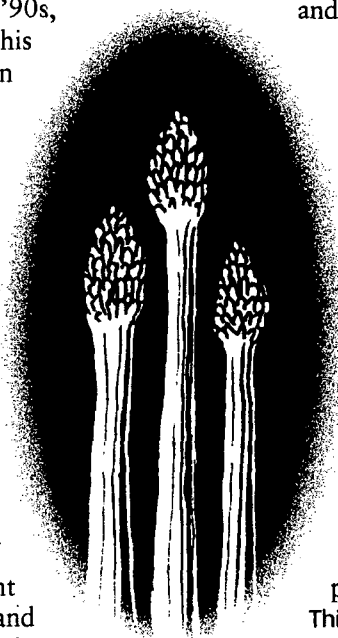
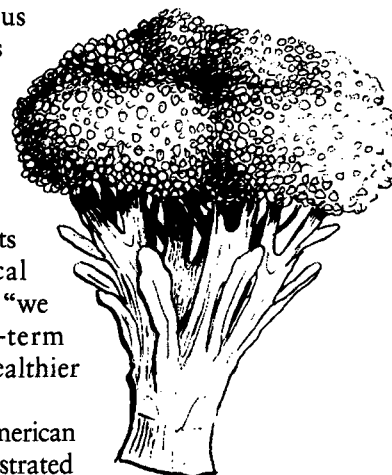
"We are not just getting higher yields and lower costs of production," says local agronomist Roberto Muj, "we are also making a long-term investment in forming healthier and more fertile soils."

In 1992, Central American small farmers demonstrated sufficient clout to gain a seat

at the annual regional economic summit of Central American presidents. "Free-trade policies and structural adjustment have given small farmers a common concern," says Wilson Campos, the coordinator of the Central American Association of Small Farmer Organizations, which claims to represent 80 percent of the region's organized small farmers. "We are all struggling to find our place within an increasingly globalized economy."

Small farmers are now organizing to save their shattered communities. "Since farmers themselves have begun to lead the small farmers' movement, we have gained a new credibility," says Campos. "Now we are able to see ourselves as a potentially powerful and positive economic force."

This article is adapted from the Spring 1996 *Food First Backgrounder*. Christopher Cook is a freelance journalist based in San Francisco. Peter Rosset is executive director of Food First and co-author of *A Cautionary Tale: Failed U.S. Development Policy in Central America* (Food First Development Studies/Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996).



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LAW

Blown fusion

*By upholding
state
anti-fusion
laws, the
Supreme Court
thumbed its
nose at third
parties and
coalition
politics.*

By Colin Gordon

In late April, the Supreme Court dealt a serious blow to both associational rights and a promising electoral strategy. In a 6-3 decision (Justices John Paul Stevens, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and David Souter dissenting) reversing the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in *New Party vs. Timmons*, the Court upheld the constitutionality of state bans on electoral "fusion," a tactic by which two or more parties nominate the same candidate on separate ballot lines. Drawing on the robust history of party politics in the Midwest in the mid- to late 19th century and in New York (where fusion remains legal and widely practiced), minor parties had argued that fusion would offer disenfranchised voters an escape from the electoral trilemma of wasting their votes, choosing between the lesser of two evils or staying home.

The basic idea is quite simple: In a fusion election,

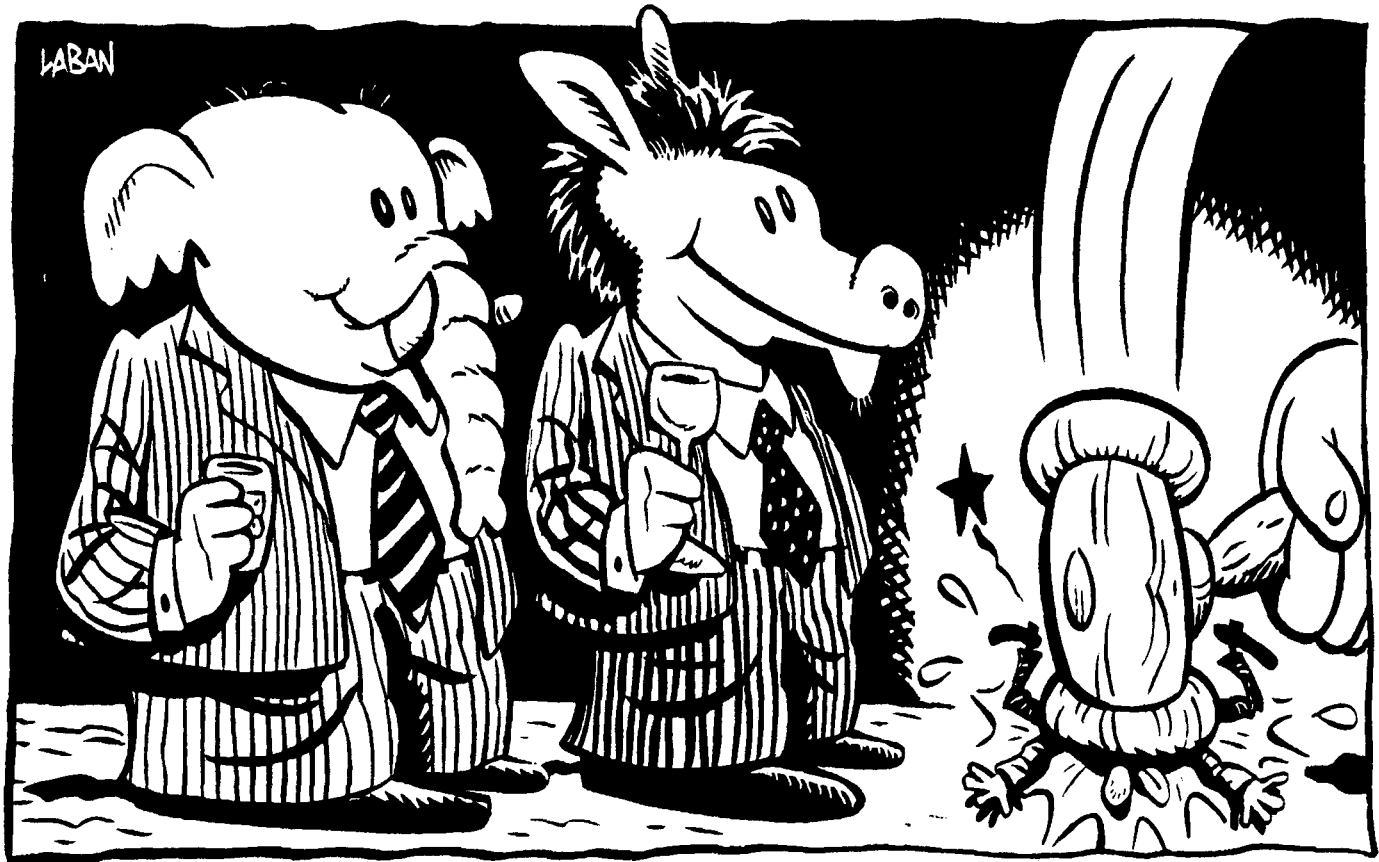
minor parties can nominate whomever they wish as their standard bearer, including a candidate already endorsed by another party. In this case, the candidate's name would appear twice on the ballot, once on each party line. As in any election, the candidate with the most votes (counting across ballot lines) would win.

Fusion is a potential boon to third parties since it allows them to join in electoral coalitions behind candidates with a realistic chance of winning. Fusion both clarifies what a candidate stands for and holds that candidate accountable to the sort of programmatic positions assiduously avoided by the major parties. Just as George Pataki relied on his "Right to Life" ballot line to win the governorship in New York, a Paul Wellstone or Harris Wofford might use the endorsement of the New Party or the Green Party or the Labor Party to underscore the importance of progressives within and beyond the Democratic Party.

Like most good ideas, fusion is nothing new. Through the late 19th century, third parties routinely cross-endorsed major party candidates. In response to extensive fusion between Democrats and Populists in the 1890s, Republican-dominated state legislatures in the West and the Midwest began to ban the practice. This was the North's version of "Jim Crow," aimed at dampening political participation and maintaining the regional monopolies enjoyed by the major parties. In the wake of these anti-fusion laws, party organizations withered, voter turnout collapsed, and third parties became short-lived, candidate-centered curiosities. Distinctions between the major parties, especially after the '30s, were reduced to quadrennial slogans and finger-pointing. Fusion remains legal in only nine states and is a routine political strategy in only one (New York).

For nearly a decade, the New Party has worked to resurrect this practice. The legal battle began in 1990, when the Wisconsin Board of Elections refused to recognize a fusion candidacy, and its decision was upheld by the 7th Circuit in *Swamp vs. Kennedy*. In 1994, the Twin Cities Area New Party nominated Andy Dawkins as its candidate for a statewide office. Dawkins, however, was already on the ballot for the same office as a candidate of a major Minnesota party, the Democratic-Farm-Labor Party. The state rejected the cross-endorsement, the New Party filed suit, and in January 1996, the 8th Circuit tossed out Minnesota's anti-fusion law. Faced with "a split in the Circuits," the Supreme Court was pressed to step in.

For the circuit courts, the legal and political stakes were quite clear. "A state's interest in political stability," urged a three-justice dissent in *Swamp*, "does not give it the right to frustrate freely made political alliances simply to protect artificially the political status quo." In its unanimous decision, the 8th Circuit found that Minnesota's statutes



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“unquestionably burden the New Party’s core associational rights.” Observing that electoral order could easily be maintained by requiring consent of the candidate and a threshold of public support, the justices concluded that “Minnesota’s interest in maintaining a stable political system simply does not give the state license to frustrate consensual political alliances” or “protect a major party from internal discord.” Indeed, the justices chided the state for suggesting that “multiple party nominations would confuse voters by giving them more information” and suggested that fusion might well recoup some of the lost promise of American democracy by “fostering more competition, participation and representation in American politics.”

The Supreme Court, in an opinion penned by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, did not agree. The court’s decision rests on three dubious premises. First, it holds that, since the burden of anti-fusion law on associational rights is slight, the state’s reasons for maintaining such a law do not warrant close scrutiny. This is peculiar logic. The burden of anti-fusion laws on associational rights is clearly more than trivial, and (as Stevens and Ginsburg note) even if the burden were slight, this should not give the state license to maintain laws it cannot otherwise justify. The majority opinion, in effect, sees freedom of association not as a pure right but as a luxury whose enjoyment depends upon a highly subjective calculation of legislative motives and consequences. In effect, the First Amendment rights of citizens who support minor parties are less important than

those of citizens who support one of the major parties.

Second, the court argues that because “many features of our political system—e.g. single-member districts, ‘first-past-the-post’ elections and the high costs of campaigning—make it difficult for third parties to succeed,” it cannot sort out the impact or burden of any one of these factors. Having already argued that the associational burden is slight, the court now argues that it cannot know what that burden is. More seriously, the majority opinion’s laundry list of obstacles to third-party growth fails to distinguish between those (such as single-member districts) whose constitutionality is unquestioned, and those (such as fusion) that clearly confine freedom of association.

Third, the majority opinion accepts at face value the state’s view that fusion would transform a “stable” two-party system into a chaos of “electoral distortions and ballot manipulations, ... party splintering and unrestrained factionalism.” This line of argument mangles the historical record, which offers no evidence of “unrestrained factionalism” or voter confusion in any fusion setting. Indeed the evidence is so thin on this point that the majority opinion relies on hypothetical scenarios of ballot chaos that bear no relation to the law in question.

The reasoning of the majority opinion is so haphazard that the dissenting justices can only conclude that “the true basis for the Court’s holding [is] the interest in preserving the two-party system.” In a separate dissent, Justice Souter goes so far as to argue that a threat to the two-party system

would certainly justify the fusion ban, while admitting in the next breath that "no state has attempted even to make this argument."

The decision, by any standard, is a starkly political one. The court is willing to wink at "slight" violations of associational rights, and to rank the stability of the two-party system ahead of the Constitution. This is both distressing and refreshing: The court candidly concedes that the two-party system is not a natural product of free association and open political competition, but an artifact of state and federal regulations crafted by the very parties that stand to gain from the maintenance of "political stability."

For political interests on the right, the court decision is of little consequence. Their influence within the major parties depends far more on money than on access to the ballot. For independent centrists, the decision is a real blow, in large part because the Reform Party is in the ideal position to offer cross-endorsement to deficit hawks in both parties. Indeed, because they stood to lose none of their core business backing and to gain from cross-endorsement by the Reform Party, the Republicans filed a brief in support of the New Party's case.

For progressives inside and outside the Democratic Party, the decision is certainly a disappointment. But the letdown should be tempered by the recognition that the fate of progressive politics rests less on details of election law than on the ability and willingness of progressives to rebuild electoral politics from the ground up.

Consider the political direction taken by the plaintiffs while the fusion case wound its way to its unhappy conclusion. In practice, the New Party's electoral strategy has increasingly concentrated on local nonpartisan races (where it has won 133 of 200 since 1992). This shift, of course, is in part a response to obstacles (like fusion bans) faced by minor parties in partisan races. But it also means that those obstacles are relatively less important to the New Party's strategy or fortunes than they were when the legal battle against fusion began. However disappointing the decision, the truth is that the New Party didn't have many eggs left in that basket.

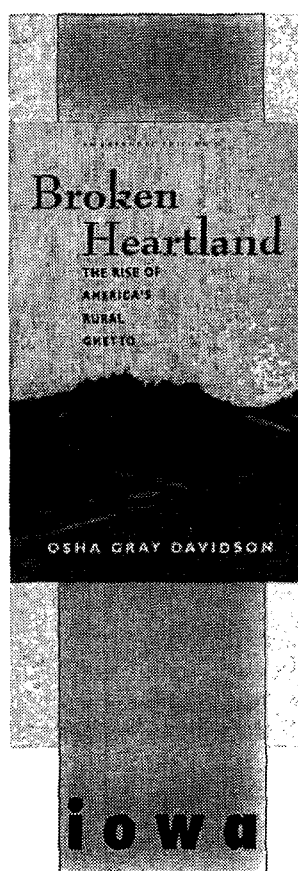
The New Party's programmatic interests have also turned to local politics. Strategically, the New Party has always been a sort of Christian Coalition of the left—interested in mobilizing local voters around local issues. Indeed local New Party activists, for whom the task of building living and breathing progressive organizations has

little to do with the fusion option, are unruffled by the decision. The New Party has made impressive progress—in Milwaukee, Chicago, Little Rock, St. Paul and elsewhere—by appealing to the disenfranchised and the disaffected alike through local electoral and issue campaigns centered on a metropolitan strategy of sustainable high-wage urban renewal, investment in public goods, corporate responsibility and the cultivation of grass-roots democracy.

For most of us, national politics is little more than a good cop, bad cop routine in which the Republicans hit us with depraved attacks on the social contract and the Democrats respond with mock concern. *New Party vs. Timmons* joins the notorious *Buckley vs. Valeo* decision (defending campaign spending as free speech) in what amounts to a constitutional declaration of support for an electoral system that the vast majority of citizens view as inherently corrupt and unresponsive, and in which more than half of all citizens decline to participate at all.

What are we to do? Certainly electoral reform remains important. After all, fusion is still legal in nine states and possible (through ballot initiative perhaps) in the others. As in the case of campaign-finance reform, what we do not win in the state and national courts may have to be won in local and state campaigns. Perhaps more importantly, and as the New Party experience suggests, we need to build real political alternatives "off the ballot" as well.

Colin Gordon is a professor of American history at the University of Iowa and a member of the New Party.



Broken Heartland

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I N T H E A R T S

All too human

The facts of Mark O'Brien's existence read like a Kafka nightmare: A six-year-old boy awakens one day to find himself entombed in a monstrous metal cylinder, a contraption from which the only escape is death. O'Brien, who contracted polio as a child, has lived for four decades in a 900-pound iron lung that methodically pumps the air in and out of him like a mechanical bellows. From this gruesome circumstance, he has somehow carved a life. A graduate of the University of California-Berkeley, he is a published poet, a working journalist and a champion of the disabled's right to live independently.

A short documentary looks at the acute insights and dispiriting daily struggles of a disabled man.

By Linda DeLibero

It's the stuff of made-for-TV movies—or as O'Brien himself calls them, “cripple of the week stories,” designed to stir viewers' pity as they underscore the comfortable distance between

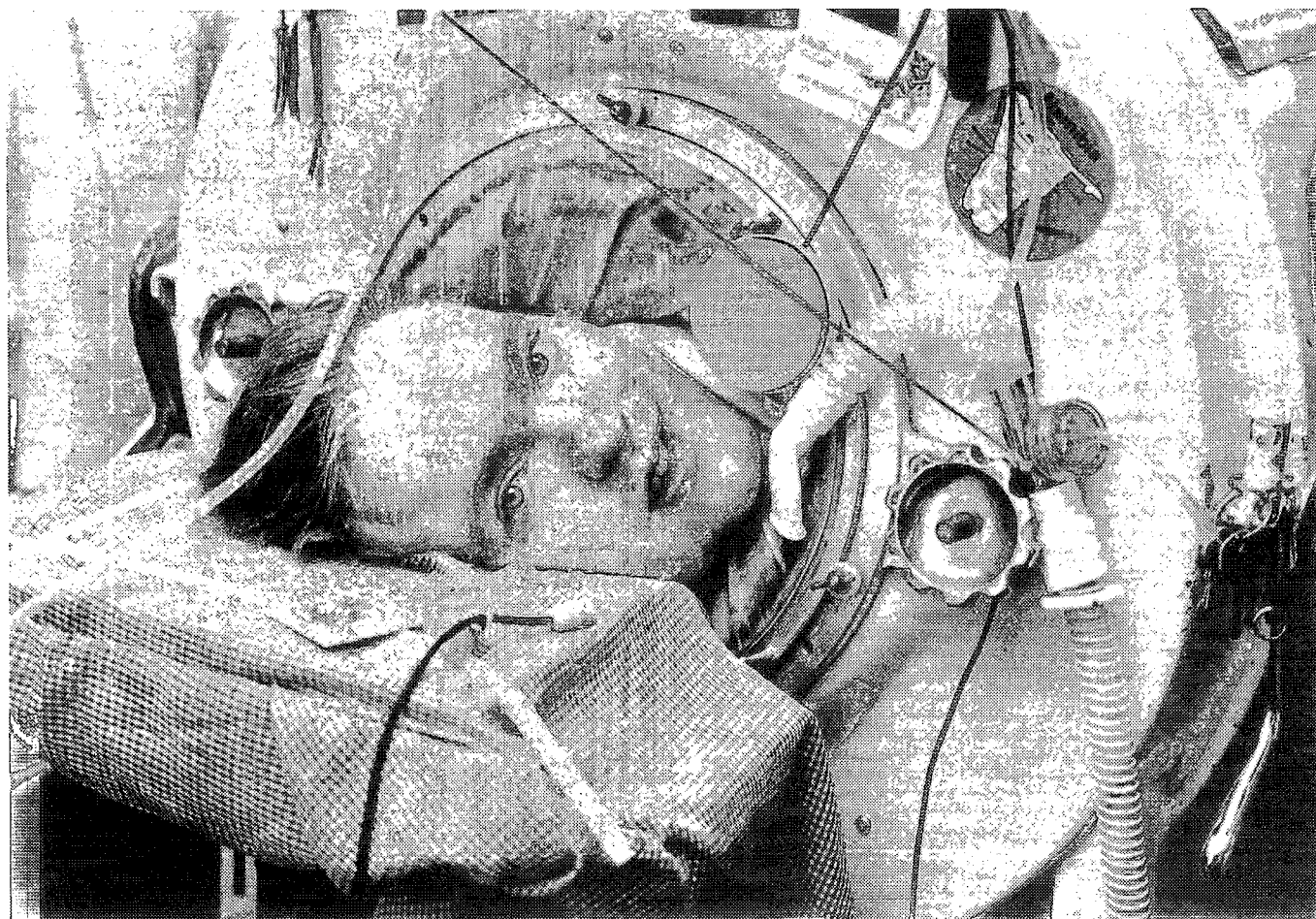
“us” and “them.” In such films, the familiar pieties—“courage in adversity,” “the triumph of the spirit”—are trotted out to assure us that we're capable of feeling all the right sentiments when faced with the body's cruel betrayal—as long as it's not our body.

Jessica Yu's Academy Award-winning short documentary on O'Brien's life, *Breathing Lessons*, attempts to circumvent that familiar trajectory by focusing on her subject's passionate, singular consciousness. O'Brien's anger and wit are unabashedly on display, as is the messy, cramped reality of his life in a roach-infested apartment. We see him being bathed by an attendant, and hear him reveal his shame over his wrecked, immobile body and speak wistfully of his encounter with a sex surrogate. Yu dispenses with the usual interviews with friends and relatives; for 35 minutes, it's mostly just O'Brien, a comely Irish mug at the end of a yellow cylinder, his voice laboring out the words between painfully sharp, mechanical breaths.

This is not to say that the film doesn't have a shape, and a fairly traditional one at that.

Between brief interludes of O'Brien reading from his poetry, the movie traces his history—polio at six, his parents' decision to raise him at home, a dispiriting two-year stint in a hospital, his relatively happy student days at Berkeley. But finally, *Breathing Lessons* is pointedly not about O'Brien “overcoming” adversity. His plans to attend graduate school were thwarted by the progression of his illness; he spends his time now carefully meting out his energy for writing. In the film, he talks candidly about the temptation of suicide, and he explains why disability might tend to reinforce one's need for faith: “If I'm a soul, I'm just as good as you. If I'm a body, I'm up shit creek, ain't I?” Mostly, what we see here is a man coming to grips with the conditions of his life, with the inevitable slide toward death. There are no happy endings.

The world divides the disabled, O'Brien explains, into two categories: “We can do anything/we can't do anything.” The latter attitude condemns the disabled to the ranks of the invisible or the inhuman; the former makes an aura of the superhuman the price of visibility. We want our high-profile cripples serenely triumphant over their broken bodies. You can see that approach working in a film like Errol Morris' *A Brief History of Time*, where, in collusion with his star, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, Morris treats Hawking's disability as incidental, so much so that the scientist's long-suffering wife (and primary caretaker) never even appears. Hawking is a godlike presence in the film, a being who lives so high up in his mind that the shriveled body—and all the work involved in its care—is an afterthought. Hawking miraculously appears—clean and tidy and encased in his well-pressed tweeds—while relatives and colleagues assure us that for the great man, the amyotrophic



lateral sclerosis that incapacitates him has never been much more than an afterthought.

Breathing Lessons, by contrast, never lets us forget that O'Brien's disability utterly dictates the terms by which he must live, as well as the way he defines himself and is defined by others. Unlike the privileged Hawking, O'Brien's world is circumscribed by poverty, by the whims of an endless procession of attendants, by the daily struggle to maintain his independence on a government stipend. What do disabled people need? "We don't have enough money," O'Brien says simply. Later in the film, he admits that he "spends a lot of time feeling sorry for myself." It is, in part, his unapologetic and clear-eyed acknowledgment of the facts that allows us to come to grips with O'Brien as fully human—like "us," like anybody. There's no point at which we're asked to forget the extraordinary constraints of his existence, and no point at which they overwhelm our sense of him as a person.

The one problem is that the film is, if anything, too brief. Yu claims that she was worried that audiences wouldn't be willing to commit much more than a half hour to her subject, and she wanted to leave viewers "hungry for more." That she does, but somewhat at the expense of the many questions *Breathing Lessons* raises about the politics of disability, about Americans' defiantly skewed attitudes toward the human body and about the complexities of Mark O'Brien himself.

To get a fuller sense of these, one need only turn to

Breathing Lessons: The Life and Work of Mark O'Brien
written, produced and directed by Jessica Yu.

O'Brien's home page on the Web at www.pacificnews.org/marko/index.html, where a collection of his journalism and poetry is available for perusal. Here, you'll find O'Brien's account of his frustrated encounter with the impenetrable Hawking, who coolly deflects the journalist's attempts to get him to talk about his disability; the unflinching records of his ongoing struggle to come to terms with his sexuality; his essays on media myths about the disabled and about Jack Kevorkian (O'Brien is deeply opposed to doctor-assisted suicide); and an assortment of poems about everything from baseball to transvestism.

Yu says that a full-length, dramatic production based on Mark O'Brien's life is in the works—that is, if she can make the film without compromising the integrity of the project. It's a good bet that that won't be possible. There's not much of a market in Hollywood for stories like O'Brien's unless they can deliver the predictable trajectory of uplifting heroism. Until that changes, I'll settle for *Breathing Lessons*, which allows the man to speak for himself. ◀

Breathing Lessons will air as an episode of the HBO/Cinemax "Reel Life" documentary series on May 22 at 9 p.m.

IN PRINT

Bearing witness to AIDS

By Jeffrey L. Reynolds

Reviewing memoirs is a difficult endeavor. It means subjecting the intimate details of an author's experiences to some grandiose and arbitrary literary standard. It means deciding whether the writer has told a story, painted a picture, developed his or her characters, and perhaps most importantly, revealed enough to satisfy the vast universe of curious voyeurs looking for a glimpse into someone else's life. Of course, it is stories about the raw material of life—sex, love, birth and death—recounted in their rawest form that tend to win the widest interest and make for the most compelling reading.

Perhaps that's why AIDS has spawned such an extensive catalog of powerful memoirs detailing the life, death, hope and despair that exists in the midst of the modern-day plague. From activist Larry Kramer's ranting *Reports From the Holocaust* to the eloquent musings of Paul Monette in *Borrowed Time*, an impressive roster of people with AIDS, their loved ones and caregivers have eloquently recorded the personal agony and collective loss associated with the premature death of more than 350,000 Americans.

A thousand burning stories reside within each of those lives. While most will go untold, Amy Hoffman and Jan Zita Grover have brought their experiences as AIDS caregivers to life in two new books designed to simultaneously memorialize and, at least in some small way, ameliorate the inescapable pain of an incurable, fatal illness.

As we head into the 16th year of the crisis, entire social circles of gay men have been devastated by AIDS. Friends and lovers have become caregivers and sometimes eventually patients themselves. Hoffman's and Grover's tales highlight the often overlooked but critical and expanding role of women in the epidemic. Though both come across as dedicated, experienced and sensitive caregivers with a penchant for the truth, each tells her story in a distinct way.

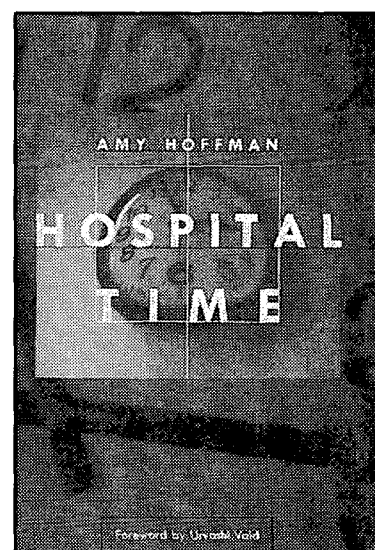
For Hoffman, the truth about AIDS is bold, angry and unvarnished. Anyone who has spent time trapped within the

four drab walls of a stuffy hospital room feeding ice chips to a dying loved one with a plastic spoon will bristle with recognition as she describes her seemingly eternal vigils at the bedside of Mike Riegle, a close friend and co-worker who became a casualty of the epidemic in 1992. "Time ticks by differently next to the sickbed," she writes in the opening pages of *Hospital Time*. "Nothing's happening—or maybe it's everything that's happening or is about to. And there's no comfortable place to sit. The bed is narrow, the patient bristling with needles, electrodes and other ICU accouterments that must not be displaced."

Hoffman's intolerance for the revisionism that plagues many AIDS novels is clear in her portrayal of Riegle's final days not as a valiant and noble battle that ends in gentle surrender, but as the demeaning, horrific and painful struggle it usually is. She neither demonizes nor deifies her subject, but describes him as a quirky, stubborn, high-maintenance friend for whom she would do absolutely anything.

Abandoned by his family of origin because of his sexuality, Riegle depends on Hoffman to be his de facto health care proxy, primary caregiver, executrix of his will, guardian of his ashes and keeper of his memories. The stinging political commentary on so-called "family values" needn't be spelled out, but Hoffman can't resist: "The healthy brother, he turns up with his man-of-the-family authority draped about him like a red scarf, and we kowtow to him like deformed trolls living under a bridge to one who walks in the light. The real family doesn't have to do anything, they merely have to exist in their majesty and righteousness, and they are a bulwark to all who gaze upon them. With AIDS, nine times out of 10 it's the fake family who cleans up the shit."

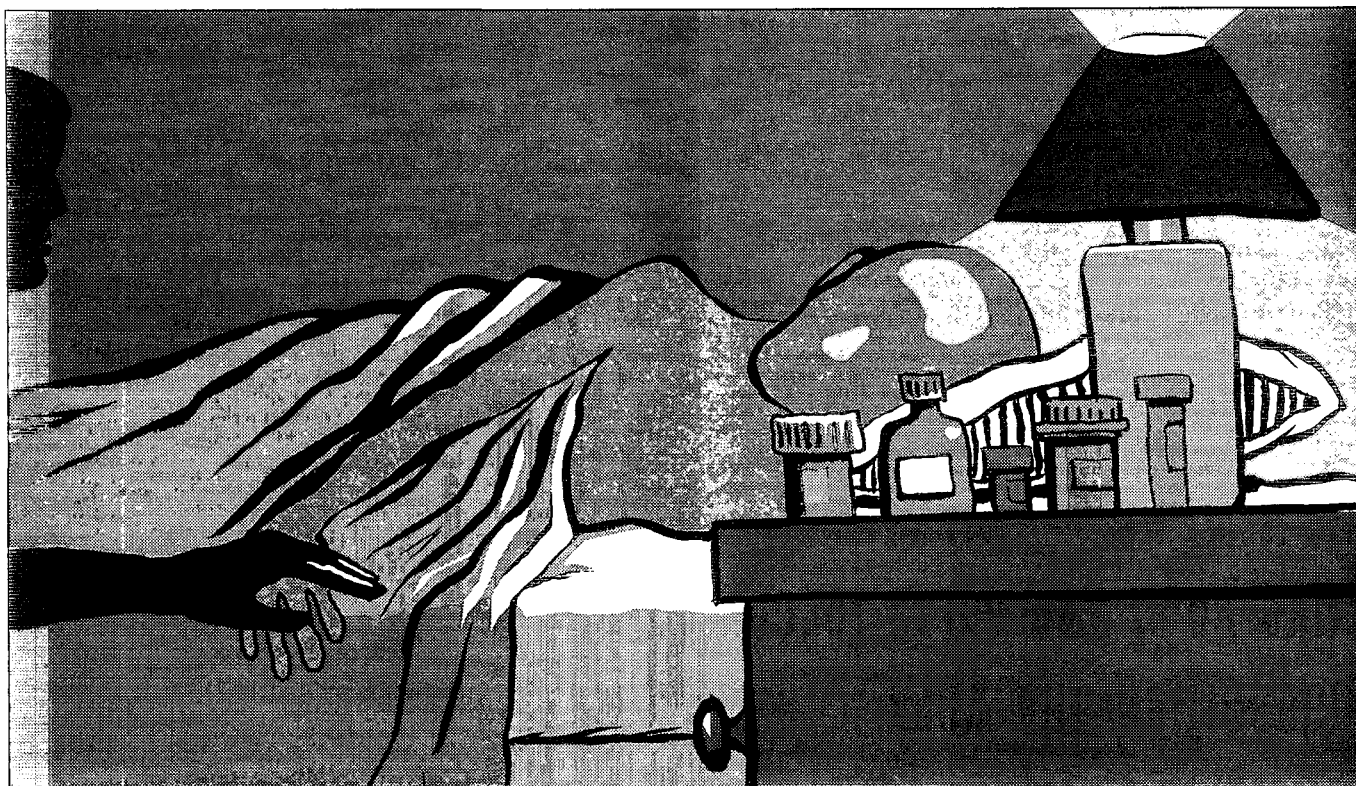
Hoffman lifts the curtain to expose Mike Riegle, his family and the ugly realities of end-stage AIDS, but she is just as revealing about her own internal conflicts that invariably add to the grueling physical, practical and emotional demands of caregiving. She deftly describes and wrestles openly with her



Hospital Time
By Amy Hoffman
Duke University Press
149 pp., \$12.95

North Enough: AIDS and Other Clear Cuts
By Jan Zita Grover
Graywolf Press
166 pp., \$12.95

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weighty responsibilities and their intrusion into her work, relationships and even her dreams. "I hated myself during the era of Michael's sickness," she writes. "I pushed myself into the middle of it, and then I not only resented him and his needs and his crazy demands, but also became jealous of anyone else who took care of him, who stopped in for a visit even. I wanted to be better than all of them. And I was worse. People would say, 'You're wonderful to do so much for him,' and I'd feel they'd exposed my hypocrisy." If spoken at all, such self-doubts are usually reserved for late-night private conversations and hushed support groups; it is this raw nakedness that makes Hoffman's book so powerful.

Those touched by the disease—personally, professionally or both—know that AIDS has a way of irrevocably altering life. The disease destroys notions of control and brings with it a forced recognition of human frailty, an accelerated sense of morbidity, and the inevitable melding of lives between patient and caregiver. For the uninfected, according to Hoffman, there is a choice. "When someone gets sick, you're either in or out. That's it. No middle ground." The natural inclination is to run, but because Hoffman loved Riegle, there was no escape.

Indeed, escaping the omnipresent realities of AIDS invariably proves futile. In *North Enough*, Jan Zita Grover recounts her attempt to leave behind her life as a buddy volunteer for the Shanti Project and a worker on the AIDS unit at San Francisco General Hospital and to escape to the backwoods of Minnesota. In describing her carefully contemplated get-away, she writes, "Reckless and burned-out, I wanted nothing more than to find a place where I might be at peace, where suburbs didn't metastasize weekly across the

foothills, mile after mile, where traffic would seem almost random, where ordinary people could still afford houses, where AIDS was still a background noise, albeit a growing one—something one might anticipate and plan against instead of react to in furious desperation."

Instead of the lush, life-affirming serenity we all fantasize about, however, Grover finds a depleted landscape that has been stripped, torn open and scarred by chain saws, bulldozers and other tools of the logging trade. Rumbling herds of caribou have disappeared, and hundreds of acres of trees have been reduced to wood chips. In her survey of the land, the eerie parallel between the clear-cutting of Minnesota's forests and the clear-cutting of San Francisco's gay community becomes immediately evident. As Grover struggles to make sense of the damaged terrain, reports of friends back in San Francisco newly diagnosed with Kaposi's sarcoma, pneumocystis carinii pneumonia and cytomegalovirus retinitis further shatter the illusion of escape.

Grover realizes that there is no such thing as "north enough," and begins to find signs of redemption in the environmental and biomedical destruction that lurks around every corner. "Fat-tired ATVs and their helmeted riders lay the land bare, ream it continuously until it runs red and open, as disease has defaced the bodies of my friends. I learn to love what has been defaced, to cherish it for reasons other than easy beauty. I walk after the ATVs now, collecting beer cans and plastic leech tubs from the banks of the bass hole, tutor myself in the difficult art of loving what is superficially ugly." In Grover's new-found world, landfills become sources of nourishment for black bears, discarded Styrofoam cups become bird's nests, and a drying splat of

human vomit becomes a robin's breakfast.

However worn the cliché, Grover's silver-lining conclusions reflect a hard-won inner tranquillity that sets her slightly apart from Hoffman. *Hospital Time* is a stark, blunt book, in which puke is still puke. Hoffman is younger and writes with a passionate fury that one senses, but never clearly sees in Grover's far more polished, contemplative and subtle presentation. Despite the difference in style, both authors skillfully bear witness to the quiet crusades of AIDS caregivers.

The way we think about AIDS has evolved as a result of recent medical advances that promise to change the course of the disease. Though both books are based on experiences that pre-date the advent of protease inhibitors, their emphasis on death—particularly in the case of *Hospital Time*—is at odds with the shifting paradigm of AIDS as something you live with, rather than immediately die from. Still, a cure remains elusive and tomorrow's AIDS memoirs will undoubtedly focus on the dual challenges of readjusting to the prospect of life while simultaneously contemplating death. Though the diminished focus on death may seem less dramatic and compelling to the average reader, stories about confronting AIDS must be told over and over again until finally someone begins to listen. ◀

Jeffrey L. Reynolds is director of policy and public relations for the Long Island Association for AIDS Care and a New York-based freelance writer.

Fishy business

Continued from page 16

was simple economic protectionism. The Magnuson Act established regional fisheries management councils to determine fishing seasons and to allocate catch quotas. The councils, which soon came to be dominated by fishing-industry lobbyists, were expressly exempt from federal conflict-of-interest laws, allowing industry members to direct as much of the haul back to their own companies and clients as they could get away with. And they did just that.

The archaic management philosophy of the National Marine Fisheries Service, the federal agency charged with maintaining the health of ocean fish stocks, has only made matters worse. The NMFS, which, oddly enough, is under the purview of the Commerce Department, attempts to manage ocean fish stocks on a species-by-species basis instead of viewing marine ecosystems as vibrant, diverse and interconnected as an ancient forest in the Oregon Cascades. This approach benefits the bottom lines of the fishing fleets, but flies in the face of current ecological thinking. By focusing only on the commercial fish stocks, the NMFS ignores the horrific toll that industrial fishing methods take on non-target species, such as sea lions and halibut, and on the marine habitat itself.

Fish remain the only wild species harvested for food by industrialized nations. But the largely unregulated pressures on the world's marine systems brought about by the advent of the factory fleets are now taking a horrible toll. That the Bering Sea fishery is considered one of the planet's most productive is a sobering indication of the downward arc of global fish stocks. The warning signs of a collapse have been spouting up for at least the past decade. A 1990 inventory of the earth's fisheries conducted by the United Nations found that 70 percent of the world's fish stocks are dangerously over-exploited, meaning that the annual mortality rate far exceeds the rate of reproduction. Not surprisingly, this ferocious fishing pattern has left over half the world's fishing grounds in critical decline.

Unless radical changes are made in the management of the Bering Sea, it may soon meet the same fate as the Grand Banks cod fishery off the coast of Newfoundland, which was closed to commercial fishing in 1992. For nearly 500 years, the Grand Banks had been the world's most lucrative fishing ground. Then, suddenly it seemed the cod were gone and, with them, more than 40,000 well-paying jobs. The closure has cost the Canadian government more than \$2.5 billion a year.

There is no easy solution. But it will start with scaling back the catch, redirecting the haul away from the giant factory trawlers and back to the smaller independent operators, and treating the oceans as what they are: an ecosystem, not a fish farm. ▶

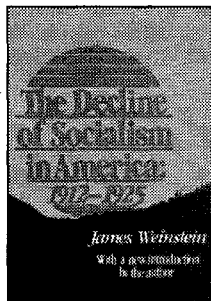
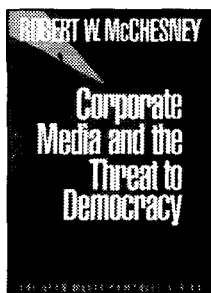
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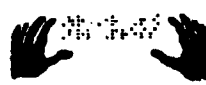
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Continued from page 40

him. Too withdrawn to answer questions or even recognize visitors, Darger died a few months later.

Many landlords might have simply trashed Darger's scrawlings. But Lerner, an accomplished photographer, recognized their artistic merit and spent the rest of his life, until his death in February of this year, seeking recognition for them. Slowly the art world has been catching on. A major exhibit of the paintings, curated by the University of Iowa's Steven Prokopoff, recently completed a highly touted run at New York City's Museum of American Folk Art, garnering praise from art critics at the *New York Times*, *The Nation* and *Time*. The show will travel over the next year to museums in San Francisco, Atlanta and Chicago.

Darger's extraordinary paintings illustrate episodes of the manuscript, a rambling prose epic titled *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. Set on another planet, the story recounts the adventures of the seven Vivian sisters, little girls aged six to 10, as they lead a race of prepubescent girls in a revolt against their enslavers, a male militia called the Glandelinians. After surviving repeated acts of humiliation and torture, the girls eventually reach safety.

Writing with a haphazard grasp of spelling, grammar and syntax, Darger filled *Realms of the Unreal* (as the manuscript is known for short) with vivid descriptions of bloody battles clearly inspired by the Bible and Civil War stories. As one skirmish concludes, "About nearly 56,789 children were literally cut up like a butcher does a calf, after being strangled or slain ... with their intestines exposed or gushed out ... hearts of children were hung by strings to the walls of houses, so many of the bleeding bodies had been cut up that they looked as if they'd gone through a machine of knives." In other passages, the girls' child-like purity and faith win them salvation. They are aided by the good Catholic nation of Abbiennia and by fantastic dragons called Blengins (pictured on page 40), who "have shown a greater fondness towards children of all nations, as to exceed the love of any mother. ... No man is safe in their presence who hurts a child."

Using children's watercolors, Darger illustrated these scenes on sheets of construction paper taped together to form scrolls up to 12 feet long. Some of the panoramas show the girls frolicking in idyllic gardens, while others depict gruesome scenes of children fleeing violent storms, being strangled by soldiers or hanging dismembered from trees. Often Darger used both sides of the same sheet, with horrific carnage on one side and a serene tableau on the other.

Lacking a sense of anatomy, he created his figures by tracing newspaper photos, advertisements and comic strips that he saved in an expansive file. Among his clippings were the Coppertone girl, "Little Annie Roonie," the Wizard of Oz characters and Shirley Temple. What today's art directors achieve with Photoshop, Darger

managed with a pencil, significantly transforming the images along the way. All the girls appear naked and rendered with tiny penises, with the exception of the Vivian girls, who remain clothed.

Darger's exotic and often disturbing images naturally raise questions about the artist himself. But since no one paid him any attention when he was alive, critics can only speculate about Darger's mental state and early life experiences. Hoping to shed light on the many questions surrounding Darger, John MacGregor, a psychiatrist, art historian and author of *Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton, 1989), has been laboring for seven years on a biography he hopes to publish next year. A volume of excerpts from *Realms of the Unreal* should follow.

Besides his pictures and *Realms*, Darger left behind several weather journals and an eight-volume autobiography he wrote late in life. According to MacGregor, the only person who's read the manuscripts thoroughly, 200 pages of the autobiography are factual. The other 5,000 describe the destruction wrought by a tornado that Darger witnessed as a child.

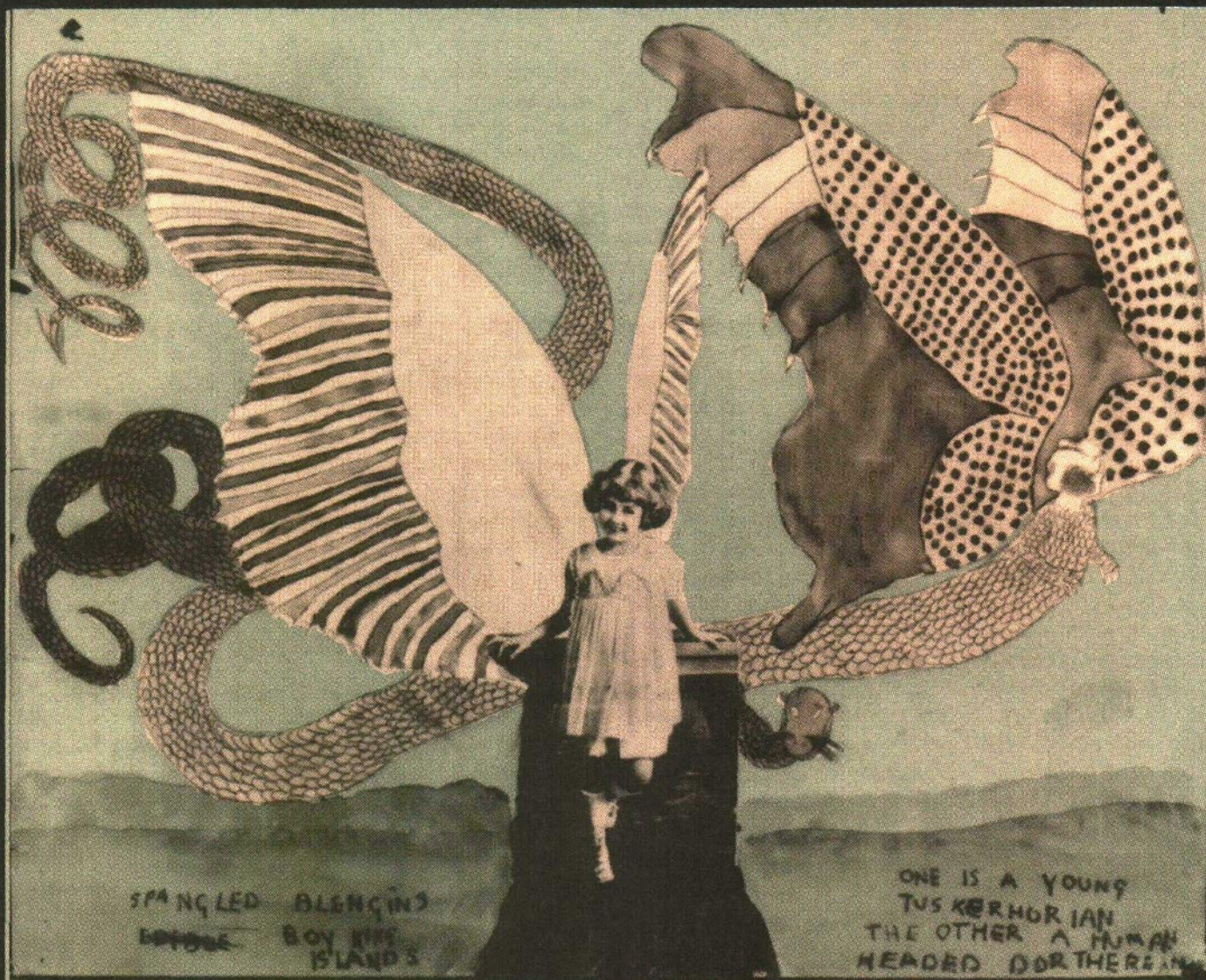
Born in 1892, Darger lost his mother at age 4 and his father a few years later. A sister was given up for adoption at birth. He was placed in a Catholic institution for boys, then transferred to the Lincoln Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, where he lived alongside severely mentally retarded children. After several attempts, he escaped from the asylum at age 16, made it to Chicago and began writing *Realms* shortly thereafter.

Having had little contact with others, MacGregor speculates, the artist drew girls with penises because he didn't know any better. His only family were the Vivian girls. He even hung framed portraits of them in his room. Heroes representing his alter ego repeatedly defend them in *Realms*.

As for Darger's future, MacGregor audaciously predicts his subject will achieve the same worldwide stature as Van Gogh one day. "I realize that's a wild statement to make," he says. "But wait and see. Within 10 years, you will see Henry Darger on Broadway, in operas and song cycles. Not a week goes by that I'm not approached by a filmmaker." Plans are being made to give public tours of Darger's room, preserved all these years by Lerner and his wife Kiyoko.

"We cannot perceive what we canonize," the author Edward Dahlberg once wrote. He was talking about Thoreau's *Walden*, but the maxim is validated by any of the blockbuster art exhibits that now dominate the agendas of our major museums. Among the crowds, the audio headsets, the corporate sponsorship and the well-stocked gift shop, the art gets lost. If it's true that Darger is standing on the threshold of the canon, I urge you to discover his work for yourself before he's admitted. ▀

Thom Powers, a filmmaker and freelance writer in New York City, is currently producing a documentary about the cartoonist Will Eisner.



COLLECTION OF KIYOKO LERNER / COURTESY OF CARL HAMMER GALLERY, CHICAGO

Discovering Henry Darger

BY THOM POWERS

The age of discovery seems to be waning and nowhere more so than in the art world. What happened to the days when an artist could direct the public's eyes to a new way of perception, as Gauguin did with Polynesian art or as Klee did with children's drawings? Among those pioneering discoveries was Jean Dubuffet's recognition of what he termed art brut, or "raw art"—intuitive works created by self-taught visionaries (many of them insane) who existed outside the art world. "True art," he maintained, "always appears where we don't expect it, where nobody thinks of it or utters its name."

We have Dubuffet to thank (or blame) for giving credence to the concept of "outsider art" in America. In the last few decades, this controversial rubric has been broadly applied to the work of various itinerants, mental patients, prisoners and recluses with compulsions for self-expression. These creations are now emerging from obscurity to

claim their place in museums.

Consider the case of Henry Darger. After living in the same boarding-house room on Chicago's North Side for 40 years, he died penniless and alone in 1973. His landlord for the last 16 of those years, Nathan Lerner, knew only that the eccentric tenant worked as a janitor at a Catholic hospital, collected garbage and went daily to mass. Rarely speaking to anyone in person, Darger could occasionally be heard in his room mimicking conversations with others.

Just prior to his death, at age 80, Darger moved into a Catholic home for the elderly, leaving Lerner to clean out the room, where junk had accumulated for four decades. Amid hundreds of empty Pepto Bismol bottles, thousands of balls of string, comic books, magazines and religious kitsch, Lerner found a 15,000-page typewritten manuscript Darger had written and several hundred watercolors painted by

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